

# **Irony and Ambiguity in Beethoven's String Quartets**

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# Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by me and is entirely my own, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

Jamie Alexander Liddle



# Acknowledgements

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the view that many of the difficulties and apparent eccentricities of Beethoven's Late Quartets (particularly Op. 130, 132, 133 and 135) may be understood in terms of irony, in the sense that it appears in the philosophical and aesthetic writings of the early German Romantics. A chain of influence is demonstrated between Beethoven and Friedrich Schlegel's philosophy of Romantic irony, through significant inter-personal relationships as well as through Beethoven's exposure to Schlegel's written works. This connection provides a firm hermeneutic basis for considering the composer's work in terms of irony.

The A minor Quartet Op. 132 is given as an example of Beethoven's Romantic irony, and considered in terms of the constitutive elements of Schlegel's Romantic irony – Paradox, Parabasis and Self-consciousness. However, this thesis also demonstrates that the irony within the Late Quartets goes beyond the confines of Romantic irony. The paradoxical structures of the Cavatina and Grosse Fuge are considered as examples of "general" or "existential" irony – a form closely related to Schlegelian irony. Moreover, the replacement finale of the Op. 130 quartet is shown to constitute a striking instance of satire: a bitter ironic comment upon the musical conservatism of Beethoven's critics.

This thesis therefore explores the philosophical background and the nature of irony itself, relating all of its forms to one underlying structure and to one fundamental process. This process – "objectification" – is derived from the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, and forms the theoretical basis for the structural approach of the analyses of irony within the thesis. The thesis also considers the relationship between irony and related phenomena such as wit and humour. It suggests that the differences between these concepts correspond to those between Beethoven's Romantic irony and the wit and humour of his predecessors.

Finally, the relationship between irony and ambiguity is also considered. Ambiguity is frequently elided with irony within theoretical writing on irony; indeed the terms

“irony” and “ambiguity” are often used synonymously. Since ambiguity is a significant element of the harmonic and formal practices within the Quartets this elision is important: if ambiguity and irony are elided then each instance of ambiguity may be considered ironic – a *reductio ad absurdum*. This work distinguishes ambiguity and irony as separate phenomena, approaching this division through the semiotic concepts of “immanence” and “manifestation”. I argue that ambiguity occurs as a particular effect of the immanent level of discourse, whilst irony occurs entirely within the manifest level. In addition to this difference in function, different structures are demonstrated for these phenomena. This distinction is applied to the third movement of the Op. 130 Quartet, which is considered as a confrontation of Classical aesthetics with the equivocal and ambiguous.

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# Introduction

Beethoven's quartets, particularly the late works are often considered to be "difficult" or problematic. Their aesthetic is often extreme, ranging from the most intimate cantilena of the Cavatina of Op. 130 to the harsh, aggressive dissonances of the Grosse Fuge, by way of vulgar peasant dances, awkward marches, solemn hymns and child-like naivety. All this is accomplished by means of sudden juxtaposition, dissociation and even by extreme fragmentation of the musical structure.

This work addresses the reason for this aesthetic, the question of why Beethoven should write these works in this way. I assume primarily that this is the result of a deliberate artistic choice, rather than viewing these works as those of a creative artist whose powers were waning, even as his health deteriorated. Throughout this work I suggest that many of the difficulties and apparent eccentricities of these quartets may be understood in terms of irony. In particular, the grotesquery of juxtaposition and multi-layeredness of the discourse may be understood in relation to the philosophical viewpoint and aesthetic practice of the early German Romantics.

This viewpoint rests upon certain basic assumptions. Firstly, that the context in which Beethoven lived – philosophical, political and artistic – is directly relevant to his work. In the period following the French Revolution there was perhaps a closer relationship between art and philosophy than had ever been before. Artists such as Goethe – the archetype of the period – were both philosophers and authors, both poets and politicians. This was, however, particularly the case with Friedrich Schlegel: his philosophy was an attempt to produce a synthesis of art and philosophy – a "transcendental poetry". Crucially, irony was of central importance to his philosophy. Schlegel's irony – which has come to be known as Romantic irony – is an aesthetic response to a philosophical perception of paradox. It is an artistic device that parallels and attempts to transcend the fundamental contradictions of human existence – the dialectic of finite and infinite, subject and object, life and death.

This thesis draws upon the work of theorists such as Rey Longyear and Robert



Hatten, who have previously suggested a link between Beethoven and Schlegel's philosophy. I share their view that the context of Schlegel's philosophy, particularly the proximity of his writing to the composition of Beethoven's quartets is important to understanding certain aspects of these works. Irony, particularly Romantic irony – was a current force in the literary and philosophical life of Beethoven's world; understanding the composer and his works within this context places him in the same milieu as ironists such as Goethe, Tieck, Schlegel and Hoffmann.

I think there is a need, however, to expand upon the understanding of both Beethoven's irony and his relationship to Schlegel: there is simply more to say about his relationship with the philosophical context in which he worked. Examination of this relationship will demonstrate that a chain of influence may be drawn between the composer and the theories of the leading German Romantics, particularly Schlegel, through exposure to their written works and through significant inter-personal relationships. This stronger connection between Beethoven and Schlegel may be considered to provide a firmer historical-contextual basis for considering these quartets in terms of irony.

In addition, although Hatten and Longyear identify certain of Beethoven's works, or traits within his works as ironic, their analyses tend to focus largely on specific elements of Romantic irony – the “destruction of illusion” and the shifting of discursive levels. Their respective approaches, as well as that of other theorists such as Scott Burnham, raise the question of the extent of Beethoven's irony: is it limited to rhetorical moments, as the focus on such ironic moments tends to imply, or is it a more fundamental principal of the music?

Closer examination of Schlegel's writing reveals that Romantic irony as he conceived it is not simply a rhetorical trope, limited to single moments of a work. Rather it is a sustained property of the artwork, its basic authorial viewpoint. This thesis will seek to examine the interesting relationship between Beethoven's work and Schlegel's philosophy of irony. It will try to establish the view that these works contain not just elements of romantic irony, but rather the extended meaning and

function of irony seen within Schlegel's writing. It will argue that, although the irony of the late works is related to other phenomena such as wit and humour, particularly of the type seen in Haydn, it is nevertheless strikingly different: Beethoven's irony is a sustained authorial viewpoint, a fundamentally Romantic ironic consciousness which produces a continual, paradoxical motion of creation and destruction, assertion and negation. Indeed, not only is this the case, but the scope of the irony within these quartets also goes beyond the confines of Romantic irony, encompassing a closely related form of irony known as "general" or "existential" irony as well as striking instances of satire.

The inherent assumption behind this question, however, is that music can actually be ironic, i.e. that irony as a discursive tool is a phenomenon that is not limited solely to literature or the theatre, but that can also function within non-representational art forms such as music. Sustaining this assumption requires that the philosophical background and theoretical basis of irony be thoroughly examined, particularly within the context of music. It also requires that the nature of the phenomenon itself be explored.

This examination therefore covers the work of the principal theorists and writers on irony: in addition to Schlegel's philosophy of irony, the work of Søren Kierkegaard – the other major writer on irony from the nineteenth century – and that of more modern theorists, including Wayne Booth and Douglas Muecke, is considered. Of particular concern, though, are those theorists – primarily musicologists – who relate music to irony. Of these, the work of Esti Sheinberg most clearly identifies the manner in which irony may be seen to be operative within musical structures. Her approach is essentially structural, relating all of irony's forms to one underlying structure, which may initially be given simply as two or more incongruous elements present simultaneously within one discourse. This produces a discourse comprising incongruous, co-existent semantic levels, resulting in multiple significations, or meanings. She argues that where music evinces this structure of incongruities it can be considered to be ironic in purport.



This structural approach forms the basis of the understanding of irony in this work. My approach differs from Sheinberg's however, in that I emphasise that irony is not simply a structure, but rather a process, unfolding in time. I therefore relate the structure of irony to a fundamental process common to all forms of irony – the process of objectification, which derives from the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. Objectification relates to the notion of “reality”, that is, to the subjective viewpoint comprising the unique experience of existence of the individual. In a case of irony there is a preferencing of one subjective viewpoint – one “reality” – over another incongruous one. In such instances the “reality” of the rejected viewpoint becomes the focus of the irony, its subjectivity becoming an “artifice”. This negation objectifies the second viewpoint, transforming it from a “reality” into an object – a victim of irony.

Within Bakhtin's work discursive irony occurs as an incongruous opposition of elements that represent such subjective realities, with the incongruity producing the same process of objectification and irony. I suggest that all occurrences and forms of irony – whether discursive or “philosophical” – may therefore be understood in terms of this objectification process. Despite differences in the function or purpose of some types of irony, or the addition of different levels of incongruity, nevertheless these separate types arise as species of the same fundamental genus, sharing the same fundamental structure, and process of objectification.

Any consideration of music in terms of phenomena such as ambiguity and irony is, by definition, based upon another fundamental assumption – that musical discourse has meaning. Although this may not be self-evident in a post-deconstructionist context, I have chosen instead to adopt the assumption of Beethoven's contemporaries: these works do possess some form of meaning.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, whilst

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Johann Georg Sulzer's statement, within a section headed “Musical Expression”, that “Expression is the soul of music. Without it, music is but an entertaining diversion. But with it, music becomes the most expressive speech overpowering the heart.” Sulzer, Johann Georg (1771-74) *General Theory of the Fine Arts* in Baker, Nancy Kovaleff and Christensen, Thomas (1995) *Aesthetics and the Art of Musical Composition in the German Enlightenment* p. 51. Similarly Heinrich Koch considers “feelings” as the content of music Koch, Heinrich Christoph (1787) *Introductory Essay on Composition, Vol. 2* in Baker and Christensen (1995) p. 148. In both instances there is an inherent assumption that music produces a significant content, even if this “meaning” cannot be translated into

this “meaning” may or may not be purely musical in nature it may nevertheless be analysed and discussed in terms of other communication systems, i.e. in language.

The approach to the analysis of irony and ambiguity in these works is therefore essentially semiotic, dealing primarily with the types of “cultural unit” seen in much current semiotic research and topic theory. It incorporates both congeneric and extrageneric significations (or other correlatives such as introversive and extroversive, absolute and referential) to locate the type of “meanings” necessary in order to express irony within the structure of the music itself. In focussing on both the fine detail of the “surface” of the score, as well as “deeper”, structural levels the analyses perhaps reflect “structuralist” concerns. This approach, however, is appropriate to the subject: the presence of musical irony is often indicated by, and located in small details, in fissures and rents in the surface which nevertheless have profound implications for the meaning of the entire discourse.

However, basing the analysis of musical irony upon the process of objectification, rather than upon structure alone better reflects the nature of music itself. Music undoubtedly possesses a demonstrable, analysable formal structure, but its diachronic nature – the unfolding of its material across or within time – is also a dynamic process. Focussing on objectification highlights this processual nature, and tends to balance the tendency of structural analysis to reduce music to a static object. Moreover, recognising that irony itself is fundamentally processual allows that this process may function in a purely musical manner. In other words, musical irony functions in the same manner as literary irony or philosophical/existential irony – as a common process, rather than only a correlation or mapping of two structures.

The exploration of the function and nature of irony raises an important question concerning the relationship between irony and ambiguity. Ambiguity is frequently mentioned in writing about irony, indeed the terms “irony” and “ambiguity” are often confused or even used synonymously. The result of this is that the two phenomena are often elided; in some cases they are even considered to be the same thing.

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definite concepts.

This viewpoint has a direct bearing upon music in general. If music is understood as a communication process then it will, by definition contain an inherent level of ambiguity. This latent ambiguity is seen most clearly in the tonal system, which relies upon the lexical ambiguity of chords for much of its process. The question that arises is that if irony and ambiguity are considered to be the same thing, as some writers maintain and as others adhere to in practice, and if music contains an inherent ambiguity, then must this inherent ambiguity be considered ironic? In short, is all musical ambiguity ironic in effect?

This question is particularly important in relation to Beethoven's quartets. There are, as will be seen, striking instances of irony within these works, as well as significant moments where ambiguity, both formal and tonal, plays a vital role in the music's process. If ambiguity and irony are considered to be the same thing, then the question of what differentiates these moments and their striking effects arises. This thesis therefore seeks to examine the relationship between these two phenomena, and to establish a workable distinction between them. This is approached primarily from a structural basis: ambiguity will be considered to possess a different structure from irony, and to function on a different level of the semiotic process. This difference precludes the process of objectification that defines irony, with the result that a successful differentiation can be made between the two phenomena. This differentiation allows the distinctive aesthetic effects of each of these important modes of expression to be maintained, and in particular allows the singular manner in which Beethoven uses each to be more fully explored.

## Critical Context

Any consideration of Beethoven's quartets, particularly the late works, must take into account an important fact: as Carl Dahlhaus highlights, "inwardly and outwardly, [Beethoven] was a contemporary of both Goethe and Jean Paul".<sup>1</sup> In other words, the aesthetics and philosophies of the Enlightenment and of the Romantics may both be applicable to the analysis of these works. Beethoven was neither wholly Classical, nor wholly a Romantic, but rather both.

This situation is in itself paradoxical and seems almost tailor-made for irony. Irony was a phenomenon common to both periods, in both music and literature. To the Enlightenment belong the comic irony of Lawrence Sterne, the ironic humour of Haydn and the dramatic irony of Mozart's operas, as well as the irony of the human condition common to so many of Goethe's heroes. The Romantics drew upon these examples (Friedrich Schlegel, for example, cites Shakespeare, Cervantes and Goethe as his paragons of Romantic irony<sup>2</sup>) in developing their own theories and philosophies of irony, broadening their conception to include paradox, consciousness and authorial presence. Within Beethoven's quartets may be seen evidence of both Haydnesque ironic humour and the paradoxical, self-conscious irony of the Romantics. Thus to consider these works in terms of irony is not to label Beethoven as a Romantic, but rather to place these works, and indeed the composer himself, within the context of a greater tradition of irony that transcends both Romantic and Classical aesthetics.

This duality is reflected in the manner in which commentators have approached Beethoven's output, even from within the composer's lifetime. E.T.A Hoffmann's famous commentary on the Fifth Symphony, for example, claims Beethoven as a

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<sup>1</sup> Dahlhaus, Carl (1991) *Ludwig van Beethoven: Approaches to his Music* trans Mary Whittall p. 66

<sup>2</sup> See, for example Schlegel, Friedrich (1991) *Athenaeum* fragments 238 p. 51, 247 p. 52, and 253 p. 53. Unless indicated otherwise all quotations from Schlegel's fragments are found in Firchow, Peter (trans.) (1991) *Friedrich Schlegel: Philosophical Fragments*.

proponent of Romanticism,<sup>3</sup> his attribution of “self-consciousness” to Beethoven attempting to align the composer with the Romantic aesthetics. Nevertheless, as Dahlhaus argues, Hoffman’s description of Beethoven’s “Romantic” symphonism is actually heavily influenced by the Enlightenment concept of the sublime and by the aesthetic and form of the classical Ode.

This dichotomy continues to function in recent Beethoven criticism. Dahlhaus himself, for example, considers that Beethoven’s “proximity to Rousseau is as obvious as his inner distance from Wackenroder or Tieck, Novalis, or Friedrich Schlegel”.<sup>4</sup> Beethoven, he considers, was more aligned in his “inner” person to Enlightenment aesthetics and philosophy than to the emerging philosophy of German Romanticism. On a similar basis, both Glenn Stanley and Michael Spitzer assert that there is actually little or no irony in Beethoven. Stanley argues that the aesthetics and philosophies of Goethe, Schiller and Kant shaped Beethoven’s artistic self-image and compositional aesthetic.<sup>5</sup> As such, he considers that musical irony was a “subcurrent” of Beethoven’s music, even as verbal irony was a subcurrent of his language.<sup>6</sup> However, in his review of Scott Burnham’s *Beethoven Hero* (a work which will be considered below) Stanley seems reluctant to accept the possibility of irony in Beethoven at all. He argues that, even if it does occur, it should be considered as a negative element – presumably of both Beethoven’s intellect and of his music – whose subjectivity is to be cast aside in favour of some objective certainty.<sup>7</sup> In addition he questions the manner in which Burnham

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<sup>3</sup> Hoffmann, E.T.A. (1813) “Beethoven's Instrumental Music” in Strunk, Oliver (1981) *Source Readings in Music History* p. 777

<sup>4</sup> Dahlhaus (1991) p.71

<sup>5</sup> Stanley, Glenn (2000) “Beethoven at work: musical activist and thinker” in Stanley, Glenn (ed.) (2000) *The Cambridge Companion to Beethoven*

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 30

<sup>7</sup> “Can the idea of heroism, as we imagine it for Beethoven and his time be successfully reconciled with the categories of irony developed by Schlegel, Hatten and Burnham? Does Schlegel’s romanticism promote the heroic idea, or does it stand in a negative or indifferent relation to it? . . . I should stress that Burnham’s ideas about Beethoven’s self-consciousness which I discussed earlier are very much on the mark; I do not think, however, that this self-consciousness is best explained by drawing on the category of irony. But even if we admit irony as an aspect of Beethoven’s intellect, I think it best - at least in the heroic music - to view it as a negative one, a thing to be left behind, to be overcome, just as the beginning



associates the self-consciousness that he identifies in the Heroic style with irony, claiming that he is not “sensitive to the ironic quality of the coda to the *Egmont* overture”.<sup>8</sup>

Although I agree with Stanley’s criticism of Burnham’s analysis of the *Egmont* overture, the basis upon which he rejects the association between Beethoven and irony is somewhat questionable. He considers that attempts to connect Beethoven’s musical humour – a concept closely related to irony – to the philosophical writing of the Romantics “have established affinities to Lawrence Sterne or Friedrich Schlegel but not direct debts; they cannot demonstrate that he knew their work”. However, as will be seen, the connection between Beethoven and Schlegel, and therefore the basis for understanding Beethoven’s humour and irony within the context of Schlegel’s writing is much stronger than Stanley supposes. Therefore, although the poets and philosophers that Stanley cites undoubtedly shaped Beethoven’s early aesthetics, I will suggest that in later life the philosophy of Romanticism came to exert its influence.

Spitzer is more emphatic than Stanley in his denial of the possibility of Beethovenian irony:

Rey M. Longyear has attempted to show that Beethoven was a Romantic Ironist. This is wrong. All the capricious contrasts, abrupt mood changes, incongruities and interruptions which Longyear catalogues as evidence of Willkür, paradox and irony are rhetorical, not structural . . . For [a] piece to be authentically ironic, the composer must attack the foundations of the structure, not the surface . . . As such, Longyear’s examples of irony in Beethoven are actually cases of Haydnesque playfulness. So Beethoven is not an ironist; rather his discourse occupies a paradoxical, even unthinkable, middleground between comedy and irony . . . it is the whole tenor of the present study that Beethoven problematises musical logic by raising absurdity to the second power.<sup>9</sup>

However, Spitzer himself subsequently attributes irony to several of Beethoven’s works

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of the true recapitulation in the first movement of the Eroica renders the anticipatory (mocking?) horn call null and void.” Stanley, Glenn (1997) Review of Scott Burnham’s “Beethoven Hero”, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* vol. 50, p. 479

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 475

<sup>9</sup> Spitzer, Michael (1993) *Ambiguity and paradox in Beethoven's late style* p. 18/19

within his analyses. For example, in discussing Beethoven's off-tonic reprises he states that "the essential difference between the early-Classical and Romantic procedure is that the former resolves the false reprise while the latter does not. Structurally the false reprise is comic and the off-tonic reprise is ironic".<sup>10</sup> In addition, he considers that "there are a number of ironies" within the harmonic procedures of Beethoven's late style,<sup>11</sup> for example, "the irony of a tonic being pervaded by supertonic of such short duration - a grace-note and a demi-semiquaver - is entirely typical of the late style".<sup>12</sup>

In addition, many of the aspects of Beethoven's late style that Spitzer identifies are frequently associated with irony. For example, one of the key elements of his argument is that the composer consistently "problematises" formal conventions, and that this problematising forms a "critique" of the Classical tradition.<sup>13</sup> However, as will be considered below, and indeed as Spitzer himself observes, the manipulation and critique of musical conventions and styles invariably produces irony, indeed, in some cases, specifically *Romantic* irony: "Romantic irony criticises the terms of its own discourse where the Classical Comedy had kept a respectful distance".<sup>14</sup> Therefore, as will be seen, despite Spitzer's assertion that there is no irony in Beethoven, the paradoxes and some of the comic elements that he identifies are actually intrinsically related to irony.

One of the most significant studies of the quartets – Joseph Kerman's magisterial survey – tends to avoid this area, relating the difficulties of these works to an analytical conception based upon predominantly technical concerns, i.e. to purely musical issues,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 55

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 141

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 271

<sup>13</sup> "To the extent that sonata form is representative of the Classical Style as a whole, Beethoven's critique of the style, i.e. Beethoven's late style, bears most of the two cornerstones of the form: the modulation to the contrasting key and the return to the tonic. For the sonata form is "Classical" in proportion to the cogency of the dominant (or third-related key) preparation and the re-transition. The piece is "Romantic" in so far as the harmonic treatment is colouristic rather than functional. Beethoven's late style is paradoxical because his procedure is neither one nor the other, nor both at the same time, nor somewhere in the middle." Ibid. p. 50

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 25, emphasis added

rather than to any philosophical or aesthetic theory. Kerman's conception of the late style is important and influential. He approaches it through the opposition of "public" vs. "private" impulses – "the duality of introspection and solicitation, the inward-outward, public-private aspect of the art".<sup>15</sup> He argues that the "public" aspect – the urge to communicate more clearly – leads to the increasing presence of lyricism, of dance-parodies and particularly of folk-like material. Against this 'popularising' element is ranged the inward, "private" aspect: the technical concerns of motivic work, part-writing and form.

However, Kerman focuses this "private" element upon contrast: he considers that throughout the late works Beethoven deals extensively with extremes of contrast, maximising contrast in some – Op. 132 and 130 – whilst effectively minimising it in others – Op. 131. From the viewpoint of contrast, he argues, many of Beethoven's preoccupations in these works may be derived. The predominance of fugue, for example, arose from his dissatisfaction with the conventional contrasts found in sonata forms: fugue provided both an alternative means of thematic working and "a fresh means to attain vehemence – but vehemence without the drama inherent in the classic [sonata] style"<sup>16</sup>. Similarly, the emphasis upon the finale and, on occasion, the middle movements of a work, rather than on the first movement, may be seen to arise from the dissatisfaction with conventional notions of contrast and cyclical form.

Above all, the play of contrast may be seen in the dichotomy that Kerman terms "dissociation" vs. "integration", typified by the Op. 130 and 131 quartets respectively. His comments on the Op. 130 quartet, in particular are important, and are closest to the viewpoint expressed in the current work. This quartet is characterised as "a mercurial, brilliant, paradoxical work",<sup>17</sup> in which contrast is pushed to its extreme, both within and especially between movements: "In many ways the Quartet in B flat is problematic,

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<sup>15</sup> Kerman, Joseph (1967) *The Beethoven Quartets* p. 195

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 273

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p. 304



but the heart of the problem lies in the quite radical attitude it embodies toward the balance, confrontation, or sequence of the movements”.<sup>18</sup>

Kerman considers that the extreme contrasts of Op. 130 result in whimsy, enigma and fascination, and a detached and aloof, rather than involved, effect. Significantly, he suggests that through this process the whole idea of the continuity of a cyclical work becomes the subject of ironic enquiry. This quartet, he argues, challenges the assumption of continuity – a logical progression – between movements; rather, it “celebrates dissociation, forced by the play – or rather the war – of contrast”.<sup>19</sup> Presumably it is the conflict between the expectation and lack of such coherent, unified progression that he considers ironic. However, it is difficult to see in what precise way this is ironic: could Beethoven, as Kerman himself argues, not simply have been aiming at a new type of cyclical work, developing beyond conventional expectations?

Indeed, although Kerman briefly mentions irony several times in relation to specific instances within the late quartets, his meaning is not always particularly clear. It appears that by ‘irony’ he refers to a general process of reversal – the presence of both terms of an opposition within a work. For example, he considers the continual ascending semitone steps of the subject of the Grosse Fuge “make their ironic reference to the downward step B flat-A of the early movements”.<sup>20</sup> However, the difference between such an “ironic” procedure and thematic transformation, or even simple inversion is not clear; many of Kerman’s references to irony raise questions of this sort.

Similarly, whilst he makes important references to paradox, particularly, as will be seen, in relation to Op. 130, the sense in which he uses the term is not always clear. For example, the reappearance of the adagio introduction of the opening movement of Op. 130 opening after the first theme is considered paradoxical in that it fulfils the role of

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 319

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 320

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 324

both introduction and theme. Similarly he considers the manner in which the cadence of the adagio reappears as figuration in the development as paradoxical.<sup>21</sup> However, he subsequently describes this derivation as ambiguous:<sup>22</sup> this elision of paradox and ambiguity is common and will be addressed in the final chapter of this work.

In all of these cases Kerman treats the double-function of the musical elements – introduction and theme, cadence and figuration – as paradoxical, a viewpoint based in latent assumptions regarding their “correct” functions. Whilst, from this viewpoint there is a certain paradoxical effect, this type of paradox is different from the manner in which I use it. Kerman’s critical comments on the quartets are important, and will be drawn upon in the analyses below; nevertheless, the manner in which he understands irony, paradox and ambiguity will not generally be applied. As will be seen, paradox is considered to be fundamentally a property of the structure of certain movements – the very structures of these works contain irreconcilable incongruities and oppositions. Furthermore, these paradoxical structures will be understood in terms of irony: as a result irony is not confined to isolated incidences, but rather informs the foundations of the movements in question.

Daniel Chua’s analytical tour de force, *The Galitzin Quartets of Beethoven*, provides perhaps the most extensive analyses of the Op. 127, 132 and 130/133 quartets. Like Kerman, Chua identifies elements of irony and paradox within these works. Such moments are frequently of the type identified by Kerman, characterised by reversals and double-images and functions,<sup>23</sup> and as such differ from the type of irony discussed here. Nevertheless, whilst many of Chua’s insights will be useful to the current work, two elements of his approach will be of particular importance.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p. 306

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 307

<sup>23</sup> “The paradoxes in the work [Op. 130, 1<sup>st</sup> movement] are engendered by a fission in the construction, in which the elements double up, duplicate themselves, insist on happening twice. Confusion arises from the blur of double images, and the clarity of events in the Classical language breaks down in the face of this ‘duplicity’.” Chua, Daniel K.L. (1995) *The “Galitzin” Quartets of Beethoven: opp. 127, 132, 130* p. 204

In addition to instances of paradox, Chua adds what he describes as “aporia” – “a path that is impassable”.<sup>24</sup> Moments of aporia are those where the music reaches a crisis, a state of equivocation – ‘undecidability’ in Chua’s terms – where multiple possible meanings occur, confounding, to a certain extent, critical understanding. For example, he considers that the final coda of Beethoven’s Quartet Op. 95 is “filled with the jollities of *opera buffa*, complete with clichés so incongruous to everything else in the quartet that the situation is one of *aporia* rather than humour; there is a creative refusal to respond to the struggle that has threatened to destroy the structure of the work”.<sup>25</sup> Chua’s analyses tend to focus on such moments of aporia, moments when the music fissures and breaks down, thereby revealing the “workings” of the discourse. In such cases, he argues, “seemingly insignificant rhythmic irregularities, tiny gaps in the music, and other surface gestures become the focus of an entire structure”,<sup>26</sup> and thus the focus of analysis.

However, as will be seen below, such moments may be considered in terms of both irony and ambiguity. In the final chapter of this work some equivocal moments of aporia produce musical structures that correlate with ambiguity: the presence of multiple possible meanings or interpretations will be seen to define this phenomenon. In some instances, however, moments of aporia actually produce irony: indeed both Rey Longyear and Robert Hatten have considered the coda of Op. 95 in terms of irony as an instance of the “breaking of illusion”. I relate such moments to the concept of “parabasis”, seen in the work of Friedrich Schlegel, the demonstration of the artifice of the artwork, and the presence of the ironic composer.<sup>27</sup> As will be considered, parabasis is an important element of Romantic irony.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 9

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 108

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 10

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Schlegel, Friedrich (1963) *Kritisches Ausgabe*, Vol. 18, no. 2 Ernst Behler ed. p. 668.

Therefore, the analyses of irony in these late works will often, like Chua's, involve the analysis of such seemingly passing fissures and incongruities. It is in such moments, though fleeting, that the paradox, parabasis and consciousness which define Romantic irony may be seen.

Unlike Kerman, Chua does relate the moments of paradox and aporia that he identifies to an underlying aesthetic – Theodor Adorno's conception of Beethoven's late style. Although Adorno's projected work on Beethoven hardly progressed beyond fragmentary sketches, his work is influential, and several elements of his theory are actually closely related to the irony examined below. Adorno considered Beethoven's middle-period style, particularly the symphonic style, to be the Classicist art *par excellence*, the embodiment of "the unity of subjectivity and objectivity . . . the totality arising from the motion of all particulars".<sup>28</sup> Beethoven's symphonism "generates a totality within itself",<sup>29</sup> a totality that is universal in that it transcends the particular, and yet is arrived at from the bottom up, as it were, *through* the particular.

Essentially Adorno considers the late style a deconstructive critique of this earlier style. He implies that Beethoven became aware that life does not correspond to this Classical ideal – there is no reconciliation of opposites, no transcendental totality. The result of this is that he came to perceive the inherent artifice in Classicist art, of which his own *oeuvre* was the highest point, and therefore "refused to reconcile in the image what is unreconciled in reality".<sup>30</sup> In this sense Beethoven's late style is really a form of realism – his "demand for truth rejects the illusion"<sup>31</sup> of Classicism. Above all, however, Beethoven's critique of Classicism is understood as a social critique: the composer expressed his disillusionment through his critique of the Enlightenment ideals

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This fragment will be considered in the next chapter.

<sup>28</sup> Adorno, Theodor W. (1998) *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music* ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Edmund Jephcott p. 151

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* p. 146

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* p. 152

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

of his own earlier music.

The rejection and critique of Classicism manifests itself within his late works as the absence of subjectivity. "Subjectivity" for Adorno relates to the manner in which an artist uses conventions and figures: the evidence of subjectivity is the removal of inessential conventions, 'recasting' necessary ones in order to express the content that the artist requires. Subjectivity is therefore a form of artistic presence, the 'signature' of the artist – the characteristics, autonomy and spontaneity that mark his use of the musical language. Thus:

In this the middle Beethoven absorbed the traditional trappings into his subjective dynamic by forming latent middle voices, by rhythm, tension or whatever other means, transforming them in keeping with his intention. Or – as in the first movement of the Fifth Symphony – he even developed them from the thematic substance itself, wresting them from the convention through the uniqueness of that substance.<sup>32</sup>

Whereas Beethoven's earlier style resulted from artistic subjectivity, the late style, Adorno argues, arises from the *withdrawal* of this subjectivity. The removal of subjectivity leaves only 'objective' elements, devoid of the subjectivity that previously transformed them into living language. In place of the Classical unity of the middle period works, the late works therefore constitute fragmented forms, with rents, fissures and unmediated juxtapositions of ossified, objective conventions as the surface of the discourse.<sup>33</sup>

In late Beethoven therefore, Adorno argues, conventions are made to speak both for and *about* themselves – they exist as both specific instances of convention, and as signs of

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. 124

<sup>33</sup> "The force of subjectivity in late works is the irascible gesture with which it leaves them. It bursts them asunder, not in order to express itself but, expressionlessly, to cast off the illusion of art. Of the works it leaves only fragments behind, communicating itself, as if in ciphers, only through the spaces it has violently vacated . . . the masterly hand sets free the matter it previously formed. The fissures and rifts within it, bearing witness to the ego's finite impotence before Being, are its last work . . . hence the conventions are no longer imbued and mastered by subjectivity, but left standing. As subjectivity breaks away from the work, they are split off. As splinters, derelict and abandoned, they finally themselves become expression . . . the conventions become expression in the naked depiction of themselves." Ibid.



that convention i.e. as “types”. The use of convention in the late works is therefore a critique of conventionality. For example, Beethoven’s use of tonality in the late quartets is, according to Adorno, “functionless”, in that, where it does occur, it occurs not as a structural principle, but as a signification – “the chord as allegory replaces the key as process”<sup>34</sup>. Paradoxically, it is in this critique that the subjectivity of the late style asserts itself – it is present through its absence, it “speaks” through its silence.

Chua follows Adorno’s notion of the late style as a critique, adding to Adorno’s theory musico-analytical tools from both Schenker and Schoenberg. Essentially, he considers these late works in terms of deconstruction: the Grosse Fuge, for example is considered to be a deconstruction of both sonata form and fugal technique. He argues that this work sets itself against both genres, to the point where it dismantles their coherence: “contrapuntal laws . . . invert into a disorder of polyphony that dismembers the very logic that fugue symbolises”.<sup>35</sup> To such “critiques that play with unity and destruction”<sup>36</sup>, Beethoven adds parody, the manipulation of “historical relics”.<sup>37</sup> All of these techniques are used essentially to produce defamiliarisation (which, again, invokes Russian Formalism), casting conventions and genres in an objectified light in order to produce a critical comment.

As will be seen, many of these elements of Adorno’s theory, and by extension Chua’s, are related to irony. (Indeed Robert Witkin asserts that Adorno considered irony to be the source of the expressive power of late Beethoven.<sup>38</sup>) For example, in considering the late quartets in terms of unmediated juxtapositions of motifs and “polyphonic

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p. 125

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p. 129

<sup>35</sup> Chua (1995) p. 230

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p. 10

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Witkin, Robert W. (1998) *Adorno on Music* p. 109/110: “By establishing its non-identity in and through its distancing of itself in relation to such [conventions and ‘empty’] forms (and in its presence as an absence from such forms) the subject takes up the stance of irony . . . this is essentially what Adorno held to be the source of the expressive power in late Beethoven.”

complexes” Adorno clearly hints at paradox, an important element of irony. Similarly, the term “subjectivity” often appears in discussions of irony, notably Kierkegaard’s *The Concept of Irony*. Finally, the separation of the subjective and the objective that Adorno considers as a critique of Classicism, for example, produces the effect of aesthetic “distance” between the artist and his work, an occurrence that is frequently associated with irony. The use of conventions that both Adorno and Chua describe – the use of the signifier as a ‘signified’ – produces music that “is no longer innocent, but knowing”;<sup>39</sup> it has a slightly parodic cast, a ‘shadow of objectification’ in Mikhail Bakhtin’s terms.<sup>40</sup> Such objectified, stylised language is, as will be considered, inherently ironic.

However, although Adorno’s conception of the late style as a critique – which Chua develops – does imply an intrinsic irony, nevertheless, this irony differs from the type proposed here. The irony that will be demonstrated in Beethoven is not simply a ‘knowing’ use of anachronisms, conventions or clichés. Although this is undoubtedly present, it functions essentially as a ‘base-line’ from which Beethoven develops the paradoxical structures and parabasis that are, according to Schlegel, the quintessence of Romantic irony.<sup>41</sup> Despite referring to paradox and subjectivity, Adorno does not link these elements to irony; indeed, his use of the terms is actually frequently different from that which occurs in discussions of irony.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Chua chooses to relate the extreme contrasts and disruptions of the Galitzin quartets to the Kantian dialectic of the Sublime and the Beautiful.<sup>43</sup> As a result, although this work shares common elements with both Chua and Adorno’s theories, the type of irony demonstrated in the late quartets will be considered not as a critique of Classicism *per se*, but rather, as Romantic irony – an aesthetic response to a fundamental existential paradox.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 110

<sup>40</sup> Bakhtin, Mikhail (1929) *Problems of Dostoevsky’s poetics*, trans. R.W. Rotsel, 1973 p. 154

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Schlegel (1991) *Critical (Lyceum)* fragment no 48, p. 6. This fragment will be fully considered in the next chapter.

<sup>42</sup> Adorno’s use of “subjectivity” – the artistic presence through individualistic use of language – for, example, is radically different from Kierkegaard’s: Kierkegaard used the term to refer to the totality of existence of his ironist Socrates.

In recent years several significant studies have, to a greater or lesser extent, considered Beethoven's works, particularly the late works, in terms of irony. Longyear's article *Beethoven and Romantic Irony* was perhaps the first attempt to relate the music of Beethoven to this important Romantic concept. One of the most significant insights offered by this work regards the relationship between Beethoven and Friedrich Schlegel - one of the most prominent and important philosophers of early German Romanticism. Longyear considers that there was no direct influence between the two, observing that Beethoven knew of Schlegel only as a translator of Shakespeare. Therefore, Beethoven's Romantic irony arises, for Longyear, not as a result of direct influence, but rather as an affinity between his work and that of Schlegel and his contemporary Ludwig Tieck. He encountered it not as theory, but rather as a concept that was, so to speak, "in the air" during his lifetime:

Romantic irony did not arise from any influence by Friedrich Schlegel on Tieck, nor from their impact on Beethoven . . . The dying Classical and emerging Romantic styles, and the pedestrian attitudes of musicians and audiences were as ripe for parody, satire, and pranks as were the sentimental theatre and the philistine actors and playgoers of the time. Beethoven, attuned temperamentally to the idea of romantic irony, expressed it in tones much as Schlegel and Tieck represented it in words.<sup>44</sup>

However, as will be demonstrated, the relationship between Beethoven and Schlegel may have been more substantial than Longyear assumes. Although he observes that the names of Fichte and Tieck never occur in Beethoven's conversation books, Schlegel's does. More significantly, as will be seen, it is possible to establish the connection between Beethoven and Schlegel from before the composer's deafness forced the use of writing for conversation: a direct chain of interpersonal relationships, some of an intimate nature, may be drawn between the two.

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<sup>43</sup> Chua (1995) p. 105/6

<sup>44</sup> Longyear, Rey M. (1970) "Beethoven and Romantic Irony" *The Musical Quarterly* vol. 56 p. 664



If a chain of influence may be drawn between Beethoven and Schlegel then it becomes possible to view the irony in Beethoven's work specifically within the context of Romantic irony. Beethoven's consciousness of irony, not simply as a device, but also as a fundamental condition of both life and the creative process of the artist, manifests itself, as will be seen, in a specifically Romantic manner within several of his late quartets.

Consciousness of both irony for its own sake and of the artistic self does form one element of Longyear's definition of Romantic irony. This definition is essentially a summation derived from Friedrich Schlegel's philosophical Fragments:

Irony is paradox, instinctive throughout, and impossible either to feign or to explain to one who cannot understand it. It should be all jest and all earnestness (*alles Scherz und alles Ernst*), and a good sign it is when one who cannot understand irony takes the joke seriously and the serious elements as a joke. "Really transcendental buffoonery" is, internally, a mood that perceives everything and rises over all limitations, even those of its own art, virtue, and originality; externally, it is "the expression of the mimic manner of an ordinarily good Italian buffo.

Irony is the "clear consciousness of eternal agility, of infinitely full chaos," a capricious appearance of self-annihilation, a playing with the contradictions of form and practice, the introduction of the fortuitous and the unusual, a flirtation with unlimited caprice - all as a means to annihilate the self, for self-limitation, the Alpha and Omega for the artist, is a result of self-creation and self-annihilation. Many writers have considered the destruction of illusion a central element in the theory of romantic irony.<sup>45</sup>

Although this is a masterly condensation of Schlegel's thought, nevertheless it presents several problems. The first of these is that there is no real elucidation of the definition: in itself it is too concise to deal with the complexities of Schlegel's thought. As will be seen, whereas Longyear presents Schlegel's various definitions of irony in the form of a montage, each sub-definition may actually be seen to be related to two fundamental elements: the ironic paradox of existence, particularly of the artist's existence, and self-consciousness.

Although Longyear does mention ironic paradox, he seems to relate it more to the

relationship of the artist to his creation - the paradoxical situation where he is simultaneously within the work and external to it, involved in its creation and objectively ambivalent to it.<sup>46</sup> In contrast, I attempt to demonstrate that, although this conception of paradox does persist in Schlegel's understanding, it is subsumed within the more fundamental, "existential" paradox of the position of the "finite" artist within an "infinite" universe. As will be seen, I consider this paradox, together with the consciousness of this paradox, to be the centre-point, the locus of Romantic irony.

The second problem arising from Longyear's definition is that the constitutive elements of Romantic irony that he identifies do not really correspond to the instances of this irony that he analyses in Beethoven's work. The emphasis of his analyses is upon ironic effects - upon elements of "parody, satire and pranks".<sup>47</sup> For example, he considers elements such as an 'insulting' cello solo, a distorted recapitulation, a "humorously sudden modulation", a purposeless fugato and a juxtaposition of contrasting material within a phrase as evidence of Romantic irony within the second movement of Beethoven's Quartet Op. 59 number 2. Moreover, he considers this movement "the most pronouncedly sustained example of romantic irony in Beethoven's music".<sup>48</sup>

Each example of ironic devices contributes to the overall effect of the 'destruction of illusion' - displaying the devices of the artwork in order to emphasise its inherent artifice. Longyear specifically identifies this destruction of illusion as the chief characteristic of Romantic irony:

The juxtaposition of the prosaic and the poetic is an essential ingredient in the destruction of illusion that characterises romantic irony.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p. 648/649

<sup>46</sup> "The artists, as an individual, animates his work and is constantly perceivable in it, yet must detach himself from it and regard it objectively, almost as if it were an illusion." Ibid. p. 649/50

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p. 664

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. p. 658

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. p. 655

As a result, it is the “destruction of illusion” that actually forms the focus of Longyear’s analyses. However, whilst, as will be seen, the destruction of illusion is certainly an element of Romantic irony I suggest that it occurs as a result of the fundamental philosophical irony. Thus, such ironic devices alone are not sufficient to establish the presence of specifically Romantic irony: they are effect, rather than cause. Romantic irony is specifically aesthetic, or philosophical in nature, centring upon the ironic artist’s aesthetic response to the fundamental ironic paradox of existence.

Indeed, the ironic effects that Longyear identifies in Beethoven may be seen to be akin, not so much to the Romantic irony developed in the theoretical writings of Schlegel, but rather to the specifically dramatic effects seen within the work of Ludwig Tieck. This arises due to the fact that, although Longyear’s theoretical definition is drawn from Schlegel, his literary examples of irony are from Tieck’s work. As will be seen, although there are similarities between Schlegel and Tieck’s respective conceptions of irony, there are also significant differences; so much so that, as Longyear himself observes, Schlegel did not consider Tieck’s work “ironic” in the sense in which he constituted the term. In addition, whilst the influential connection between Beethoven and Schlegel provides a hermeneutic framework for considering Beethoven’s irony in terms of Schlegel’s theories, it is not possible to establish such a connection to Tieck.

Thus although the elements that Longyear demonstrates in Beethoven are indeed ironic, they are not, as will be seen, specifically *Romantically* ironic in the Schlegelian sense: indeed such devices may be seen in many works predating the conception of Romantic irony. As a result, although the connection that Longyear suggests between Beethoven and Schlegel will be important for this current work, the actual cases of Romantic irony that he identifies will be seen to differ significantly from those considered below.

John Daverio, in his article on the chamber music for strings in *The Cambridge Companion to Beethoven*, also links Beethoven’s quartets to the theoretical work of Schlegel. He uses one of Schlegel’s (unpublished) fragments as a framework for his

understanding of the development of the quartets:

The various types of novel [*Romanarten*] are determined by manner, tone and tendency [*Manier, Ton, Tendenz*]. But for the classical genres, style, content and form [*Styl, Stoff, Form*] are the determining factors.<sup>50</sup>

Daverio argues that Beethoven was concerned with the transformation and rethinking of the norms of the quartet genre, to the point where the genre almost dissolves. Essentially he considers that this transformation may be seen across the traditional three-period division of Beethoven's work, and that these divisions correspond to the three elements of the Romantic art form that Schlegel identifies:

In the string chamber music of his earlier period Beethoven strove to establish an individual *manner*, in his middle phase he effected a transformation of the *tone* of the string quartet and quintet and in his late quartets he challenged the aesthetic unity at the heart of classicism by resorting increasingly to *tendency*.<sup>51</sup>

Daverio relates the late quartets, particularly the Galitzin quartets, to Schlegel's concept of the fragment. It is through the fragmentation of form, the replacement of the "self-sufficient, rounded forms of Classicism with the intentionally fragmented structures of modernity",<sup>52</sup> that Beethoven's late quartets exhibit the 'tendency' of the Romantic artform.

Significantly, Daverio also identifies the presence of irony as an element of this 'tendency' in the late quartets, particularly in the scherzo-like movements of Op. 132 and 131 and the finale of Op. 127. In this finale, the extensive "false reprise" is not simply a good-humoured, Haydnesque device: rather, he considers that it interrupts the continuity of the music to the point where it becomes "cast in an ironic light".<sup>53</sup> Daverio considers the ironies that he identifies simply as "rhetorical devices" (i.e. they "say one thing and mean another"), and that Beethoven used these essentially to expose

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<sup>50</sup> Daverio, John (2000) "Manner, Tone and Tendency in Beethoven's Chamber Music for Strings" in Glenn Stanley (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Beethoven* p. 151

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. p. 152

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p. 152

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p. 161

the artifice of his own art. In this sense, within the context of the transformation of genres, they therefore form a type of authorial comment upon these genres themselves: irony is used as a *device*,

The manner in which Daverio approaches irony in Beethoven arises largely because, although he uses the work of Schlegel both as a framework for understanding Beethoven's quartets, and a link to Romantic tendencies, there is little examination of Schlegel's actual theories. (The fragment that Daverio uses occurs in an unpublished notebook.) The result of this is seen in particular in relation to the late style. As will be seen, throughout Schlegel's work irony is considered not simply as a device, but rather as an aesthetic, philosophical principle, one of the most important elements of his Romanticism. Therefore, the ironic devices that Daverio identifies are not really *Romantic*, i.e. Schlegelian irony, rather they are more closely related to the "comic" satirical irony of the type seen in Haydn and Lawrence Sterne. As I attempt to demonstrate, Romantic irony is located in Beethoven, not so much in such rhetorical devices, but rather as an underlying, pervading principle and process of several of his late quartets.

Robert Hatten's seminal work *Musical Meaning in Beethoven* also approaches irony in terms of structural principle. His consideration of irony in Beethoven, however, occurs within the greater context of the semiotic concerns of his work. In other words, he is more concerned with the manner in which musical semiotics can account for cases of musical irony and metaphor, than with the manner in which irony informs Beethoven's work. His position is really a development of Longyear's, whose definition of Romantic irony forms the basis of Hatten's own understanding. However, as has been considered, Longyear's analyses focus upon ironic devices, rather than the paradox and parabasis so prevalent in Schlegel's writing. Hatten's reliance upon Longyear's work means that, by extension, his understanding of Romantic irony shares the same problems.

Although the philosophical basis of the irony that Hatten identifies is ostensibly derived



from Schlegel, the theoretical basis of his conception of the manner in which irony may be seen in music centres upon the concept of “troping”. Troping is defined as occurring “when two different correlations are brought together to produce a third meaning”,<sup>54</sup> thus essentially a trope arises as a synthesis of one new meaning from two older, contradictory meanings belonging to the same language or signifying system. However, despite this theoretical work, in practice the instances of irony that he identifies in Beethoven focus upon the notion of a “shifting of discourse level”. This concept draws on the work of Carolyn Abbate, who argues that such shifts within music indicate a narrative presence – the “speaker” of the dialogue, as it were – and is closely related to Bakhtin’s “heteroglossia”.<sup>55</sup>

Hatten argues that shifting discursive levels indicates not simply a narrator, but rather the self-consciousness of the artist, drawing attention to his ability to be “outside” of his own artwork. As will be seen, such self-consciousness is an essential element of Romantic irony. He considers that in music “extreme contrasts in style or topic (especially where they suggest a reversal), cueing of recitative as a topic, direct quotation or intertextual importation, disruptions of the temporal norm, or even negation”<sup>56</sup> may indicate such a shift in the level of the discourse.

He demonstrates the first of these in the closing section of the finale of the Op. 95 Quartet. This analysis is essentially the same as Longyear’s, except that Hatten refers to the section as an “addendum”, rather than a coda. This implies that this section is effectively added on: the extreme juxtaposition of this section with the preceding movement cues a shift in discourse level, with the result that it is perceived as an ironic postscript, whose buffo-like character undermines the seriousness of the preceding movement. Charles Brauner, who demonstrates the device in both the ironic poetry of

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<sup>54</sup> Hatten, Robert (1994) *Musical Meaning in Beethoven: Markedness, Correlation and Interpretation* p. 166

<sup>55</sup> See Abbate, Carolyn (1991) *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* and Morson, Gary Saul and Emerson, Caryl (1990) *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* p. 139-145

Heinrich Heine and Schumann's settings of the works, has also considered "surprise" endings of this sort in relation to music.<sup>57</sup>

Hatten considers that intertextuality is related to irony in that it functions reflexively within the discourse. Instances of intertextuality (including references or quotations of other styles, or quotations from the given work within itself) highlight the process of the discourse from within the discourse – i.e. they draw attention to the essential artifice of the unfolding artwork. He considers that Beethoven's stylisation of both Renaissance and Baroque styles in the third movement of the Op. 132 Quartet is such an instance of intertextuality, producing a discursive shift that may be taken as an indication of a tropological interpretation.

However, I would suggest that intertextuality, or allusions to other composers or styles do not necessarily imply a shift in discourse level, and as such are not automatically to be considered ironic. Certainly allusions or quotations may draw extra meaning into a work – consider the references to *An die Ferne Geliebte* in Schumann's Fantasy. They may even be attributed to the presence of a narrative voice, able to draw comparisons to works or contexts external to the discourse. However, this type of narrator is more akin to that discussed in Edward Cone's *The Composer's Voice*, than to the ironic artist of Schlegelian Romantic irony. Such a narrator is not necessarily ironic simply because of his superior position; rather the decisive issue will be the nature of the intertextuality. If, as in the case of Schumann, the intertextuality is internally congruent, then no irony will occur, and the external reference is accepted as a simple quotation, homage etc. If, on the contrary, there are incongruities within the intertextuality, then it will tend towards parody and will therefore, by definition, be ironic in nature.

As will be seen, I do consider the Op. 132 Quartet to be ironically motivated, but not

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<sup>56</sup> Hatten (1994) p. 202

<sup>57</sup> Brauner, Charles S. (1981) "Irony in the Heine Lieder of Schubert and Schumann", *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 67 p. 269 and 275

simply because of the intertextuality. Rather I will argue that Beethoven produces a paradoxical situation, a chain of allusions, stylisations and parodies, each of which undermines the others. This produces an infinite negation of the type considered by both Schlegel and Søren Kierkegaard – an infinite negation that is ironic in purport.<sup>58</sup>

Whilst I agree with Hatten that sudden juxtapositions and intertextuality can produce discursive shifts, I would suggest that the cueing of recitative as a topic to indicate a shift in discourse level is problematic, particularly in relation to Beethoven. Hatten cites this topic – in particular the salient first inversion chord that stylistically heralds the topic – in relation to perceived discursive shifts in the Op. 130 Quartet and the *Hammerklavier* sonata. He considers that the use of recitative within such instrumental music produces the effect of a narrative voice – an intruding presence that is understood to be fundamentally ironic in purport. Indeed, throughout his discussion the topic is treated as though it were somehow ‘reserved’ specifically for instances of musical narrating.

However, I would suggest that although, through extreme juxtaposition, the cueing of recitative *may* be used to shift discursive level, recitative alone does not necessarily lead to such a shift. The fact that recitative occurs as a topic means that, like any other topic or style, it is susceptible to the artistic manipulation of the composer. Indeed, Beethoven had previously used it in precisely this manner in instrumental works: the recitatives in the piano sonatas Op. 31 number 2 and Op. 110, for example, form integral parts of the structures of the movements. In these cases, the use of recitative produces a “narrative” topic, but this topic occurs as part of the discourse. Therefore no shift in level is produced by the use of the topic, and thus no “external” narrator.

In the cases cited by Hatten the shift in level, if indeed it does occur, should really be considered to arise because of the type of juxtaposition already identified, rather than

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<sup>58</sup> Schlegel (1991) *Athenaeum* fragment 51, p. 24, also *Critical (Lyceum)* fragment 37, p. 4 and



simply from the use of recitative. Hatten's own analysis of the third movement of the Quartet Op. 130 actually supports this view: "The abrupt, operatic interruption [by the recitative topic] in m. 17 suggests a persona".<sup>59</sup> The shift of level is achieved not simply by the insertion of the recitative topic, but by the juxtaposition of these elements with the preceding music. In fact, as I will argue in the analysis of this movement in the fourth chapter of this work, the structure and function of both the "operatic" moments and the introduction to the movement may be explained in terms other than an ironic discourse shift.

Even if one accepts the use of recitative as constituting a musical narrative "voice", this fact alone is still not sufficient to produce irony. Indeed, although the artistic device of a narrator may possess an inherent potential for irony, the mere presence alone of such narrative voices as are identified by Hatten, Abbate and Burnham is not ironic. As will be seen, the intrusion of a self-conscious authorial presence is an important element in Schlegel's philosophy of irony, a device he refers to as "parabasis". However, in Schlegel's writing parabasis is considered ironic only in conjunction with self-consciousness and paradox. Thus the instances of narrating in Hatten's examples cannot be considered to be ironic in Schlegel's sense.

Like Hatten, Burnham's discussion of irony in Beethoven draws upon the philosophical/theoretical basis provided by Longyear, focusing on the important concept of self-consciousness. However, his identification of irony in Beethoven is unusual in that, unlike Longyear and Hatten, he focuses on works from the composer's middle period, his so-called "Heroic" style. Indeed, it is doubly unusual in that he does not focus on ironic moments within works, but rather attributes it as a property of the heroic style. His attribution of irony to works from this period is based upon his perception of a narrative "voice" within these works, a voice which he considers "self-conscious", subjective and ironic.

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Kierkegaard (1841) p. 216/217

Burnham traces the concept of self-consciousness throughout the “Goethezeit” (which is the age, not only of Goethe, but also of Kant, Hegel and Schiller), considering its presence in both the typical Goethian hero and the philosophical systems of Kant and Hegel. Burnham argues that the typical hero of the “Goethezeit” sees himself from “outside” – “he both enacts and sees himself enacting, and thus bears the weighted wrap of self-consciousness, *the* human condition which was to become fundamental to German Idealism’s concept of reality and its history”.<sup>60</sup> Such a hero is not only conscious of his actions but is also able to contemplate his own actions objectively, as though they were those of another. In other words he both acts and observes, enacts and narrates.

Within the philosophical systems of Kant and, in particular, of Hegel the concept of self-consciousness is greatly expanded:

The progress from Kant to Hegel consists of nothing less than the transformation of human cognition from a radically limited interface with reality to the origin and destiny of all reality. (In other words, that which was confined to putting a distinctly human construction on a forever unknowable reality now constructs - in the strong sense - that reality).<sup>61</sup>

Within Hegel’s philosophy, self-consciousness of the type attributed to the “Goethezeit” hero evolves into a position of absolute subjectivity. If the world is to be defined through the subjectivity of the self then, in a sense, the self becomes the world. Thus, when the self-consciousness becomes the defining factor in constituting “reality”, “reality” actually becomes subjectivity.

An important element of this subjectivity is the inclusion of the self within this subjectivity. Since the self defines subjective reality, the process of self-contemplation is the beginning of the process of the contemplation of this subjective reality. The self is

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<sup>59</sup> Hatten (1994) p. 176

<sup>60</sup> Burnham, Scot (1995) *Beethoven Hero* p. 116/7

therefore simultaneously an organic part of a greater whole, and also the totality of that whole. Burnham considers that Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is an embodiment of this process, representing "thought contemplating itself". This results in what he describes as a 'closed' system - "the self generates and culminates its own destiny".<sup>62</sup>

Burnham associates Beethoven's compositional approach in the heroic style to the concepts of subjectivity and self-consciousness of the "Goethezeit". He argues, in effect, that Beethoven's Heroic style is a counterpart to the philosophical systems of Hegel, in that it too represents a 'closed' system, "self-generating, self-sustaining, and self-consuming".<sup>63</sup> This view centres on Beethoven's much-vaunted thematic process: the manner in which Beethoven constructs entire movements from thematic material is taken as a process of the individual becoming the totality, i.e. of subjectivity. This viewpoint, however, is dependent upon an anthropomorphising of the thematic process: in other words it is dependent upon an association of the theme with a person. The theme is simultaneously an individual, and yet is subsumed in an organic whole that it actually generates.

Burnham relates the thematic process in the heroic style to the self-consciousness and subjectivity described above. He identifies the theme with a "Goethezeit" Hero; middle-period works thus represent a narrative that is both enacted (through the thematic process and the outworking of the musical discourse) and narrated. This dual process - simultaneous enacting and narrating - is therefore understood as Hegelian self-consciousness and subjectivity.

This viewpoint hinges upon the presence within these works of a narrating "voice". Burnham considers that at certain points in some of the Heroic style works - for example in the coda of the *Egmont* Overture, and in the famous horn calls in the *Eroica*

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. p. 113/4

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. p. 117

Symphony - a narrating voice intrudes upon the discourse. The result of this is that these works, together with Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, are treated as *Bildungsroman*, i.e. as first-person narratives. He argues that such works can only be composed from the viewpoint of their ending - the narrative voice can only "tell" the story from "outside" the action. It is the presence of this "external" narrating voice that transforms such works into self-conscious works that both enact and speak of the process of enacting.

However, Burnham argues that the presence of this narrative voice also creates irony. He considers that all such narratives are fundamentally ironic because of the superior knowledge of the narrator - his knowledge betrays his position 'outside' of the actual process of the narrative.<sup>64</sup> (He refers to the manner in which Dickens sometimes makes ironic comments on the still-to-come fate of characters that he is introducing). The Heroic-style works are therefore inherently pervaded by irony.

Although Burnham's discussion of narrative presence - a "telling voice" - in these works is generally convincing, his attribution of irony to this narrating voice raises several problems. The first of these centres upon the notion of the narrative "voice" as being somehow an external narrating presence. He considers that the manner in which Beethoven uses sonata form in these middle-period works is both "internalised" and "externalised". That is, that although the music is actually in sonata form, there is also, at certain crux points, a simultaneous narration, a narrative voice that speaks *about* sonata form from outside the discourse.<sup>65</sup> Burnham refers to this narrating "voice" as

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p. 118

<sup>64</sup> "The more pervasive irony of this period rests in the simultaneous assumption that the world is all that the self is . . . and yet that one can stand apart from this master narrative, in fact, must stand apart from it in order to narrate it, or even to be aware of it. This is why the trope of narration plays so well in studies of nineteenth-century culture: the very act of self-awareness, of self-consciousness, is a type of narration. And all such narration is fundamentally ironic." Ibid. p. 146/147

<sup>65</sup> "The extrovert voice of this music speaks from outside the formal process, across that process, or of that process. This is perhaps most perceptible at the coda . . . but can be heard throughout a movement as that pressurised utterance that tells of beginnings, middles and endings. This voice is both a distanced, narrating entity, speaking from a place beyond the moment-by-moment temporal enactment of the music,

either “Beethoven’s hero” or as “Beethoven Hero”, i.e. as either a heroic figure, the heroic self, or as the “voice” of Beethoven himself.

The assertion of the external nature of this narrative voice is, however, problematic. The narrative “voice” within these works is not an external presence, but rather is an artistic device created by Beethoven: however compelling this “voice” may be, it nevertheless remains an internal device of the artwork. (Indeed, as will be seen, Beethoven does, on occasion, actually undermine such devices to ironic effect.) Moreover, the presence within a work of such narrative devices alone does not constitute irony. It is certainly the case that in a *Bildungsroman* irony may occur, if the narrator treats his characters ironically; this, however, is simply a type of dramatic irony. Therefore, Burnham’s assumption that narrative “voices” of the type seen in Beethoven are inherently ironic is somewhat problematic. If all works that evince narrative voice – all *Bildungsroman*, and indeed much of world literature – are to be considered ironic, then, at the least, irony becomes a very commonplace occurrence, and thus rather meaningless as a concept.

Indeed this problem actually arises in Burnham’s final chapter. Here he argues that “presence” - the narrating voice - of the type identified is the essence of the heroic style, rather than simply the thematic process. He considers that, in enshrining these heroic works as the paradigm of tonal music we have elevated that “presence” – it is not the thematic process, the striving towards the end point, or the heroic ‘overcoming’, but rather the Beethovenian “voice” that is the epitome of music. He argues that we return many times to favourite works, not simply to hear the process, but rather to experience the ‘presence’ of the composer, to hear the ‘voice’. The problem with this view is that such ‘presence’ is earlier identified as ironic. If this presence is ironic, and if such a presence defines both the experience of music and our criteria for “good” music, then music is by definition, at baseline, ironic.

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and the very sound of that music’s ongoing process.” Ibid. p. 144



The difficulties encountered in Burnham's assertion of an ironic narrative voice in Beethoven arise from the fact that there is little definition of irony within his work. Rather, he simply refers to the irony that Longyear and Hatten demonstrate, presumably adopting their definitions. The manner in which these authors approach Beethovenian irony, however, is, as demonstrated, not without problems. Neither author, though, deals with the type of "systemic" irony, considered by Burnham. Rather, they essentially focus on ironic devices, particularly the destruction of artistic illusion.

In addition, the attribution of irony to such works, particularly in light of the parallel drawn to Hegel's work is not really justified on the hermeneutic ground that Burnham lays. As Kierkegaard observes, Hegel dismisses irony, specifically Schlegelian irony, as an exaggeration of the negation stage of his dialectic. Thus to attribute irony to Beethoven because of his proximity to Hegel and Kant is perhaps flawed.

However, as will be seen, self-consciousness and subjectivity *are* considered to be ironic - in a certain specific sense - within the work of both Kierkegaard and Schlegel. Kierkegaard considered that Socrates' irony arose from his self-consciousness and subjectivity. However, it is not these qualities alone that produced the irony, but rather their incongruity and juxtaposition with Socrates' historical context. Likewise, although self-consciousness and subjectivity occur in Schlegel's theoretical writing this self-consciousness is consciousness not only of one's own enactment, but also of the fundamental irony and paradox of that position. Thus there is a double self-consciousness (an awareness of one's awareness as ironic), a double subjectivity. Kierkegaard refers to this concept as "subjectivity raised to a higher power", identifying this "subjectivity's subjectivity" as the essence of Schlegel's irony.

Therefore, although Burnham tries to link the "irony" that he identifies in Beethoven with Romantic irony, self-consciousness and narrative presence alone cannot be considered to be Romantic irony, either of the type discussed by Hatten and Longyear, or of that seen in the work of Kierkegaard, Hegel or Schlegel.



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In addition to those works that explicitly consider the relationship between Beethoven and irony, several recent studies consider the composer's work in relation to concepts that form important elements of Romantic irony. Like Burnham, James Hanley Donelan asserts that Beethoven's music, specifically the Op. 130/133 Quartet, exhibits self-consciousness, a concept that he traces through the philosophical system of Hegel and the work of Hölderlin and Wordsworth:

Opus 130/133 is, in musical terms, the assertion of a self which looks back upon its constitutive elements, and in a clear, audible, and real sense, achieves self-consciousness through this reflection.<sup>66</sup>

He considers that in this quartet, particularly the first movement, Beethoven creates his own tonal structure, based in a key-scheme of ascending thirds rather than the tonic/dominant opposition of conventional sonata movements. In addition, he argues that the manner in which Beethoven foregrounds counterpoint as an intrinsic element of the entire structure of the Quartet is also unique, producing a preferencing of theme over formal convention. The Grosse Fuge therefore arises as the consummation of both elements of this unique approach.

He considers that, whilst Beethoven's compositional approach in this quartet is unique, nevertheless, in order for it to be intelligible, it functions within "the discourse of traditional classical harmony, counterpoint, and sonata-allegro forms".<sup>67</sup> He argues that Beethoven highlights this duality through the incorporation of "constant, audible references to the past", i.e. the conventions of the quartet and of sonata form. These include a parodic second subject – reminiscent of Haydn – in the first movement, trite circle of fifth progressions that reference conventional modulatory procedures and dance

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<sup>66</sup> Donelan, James Hanley (1993) *Self Consciousness and Music in Early Romanticism: Holderlin, Hegel, Wordsworth and Beethoven* p. 222

movements based on banal melodies and progressions.

The result of this is that a dialectical tension is established between the unique tonal and structural language of this quartet and the conventional gestures of the genre, and it is this tension that Donelan considers to be the locus of the self-consciousness that he attributes to the work. Essentially the opposition of the unique elements with the conventional mirrors the Hegelian opposition of the individual and the universal, or subjective and objective that is at the centre of Romantic self-consciousness:

This is self-consciousness expressed in musical terms: an identity in the musical discourse which becomes aware of itself through its opposition and contrast to the other of traditional musical form. This identity nevertheless depends upon the other for its articulation; in this case, the other is traditional form.<sup>68</sup>

Like Burnham, Donelan considers that Beethoven's thematic process embodies this self-consciousness, with the theme functioning as "the assertion of the composer's identity, the self as the musical theme".<sup>69</sup> Although certain elements of Donelan's discussion, particularly the manner in which he demonstrates Beethoven's parodic use of Haydnesque conventions, relate directly to irony, unlike Burnham, he does not generally associate self-consciousness with irony. Rather he treats it simply as a philosophical concept in its own right, demonstrating a plausible philosophical/hermeneutic background for considering Beethoven's work in these terms.<sup>70</sup>

Donelan's work is stronger for this. Beethoven uses the *devices* outlined above to create the artifice of a narrative, self-conscious voice. However, this self-consciousness alone is not ironic, as Burnham suggests, at least not in the Schlegelian sense. In Schlegel there is, as Kierkegaard wrote, a "subjectivity's subjectivity", i.e. not simply self-

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid. p. 221/222

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. p. 222

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> This may be summed up thus: "self-consciousness is a fundamental structural principle of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century thought which disseminated not from a single source, point, or discipline, but from a matrix of common concerns among poets, philosophers and composers". Ibid. p. 3

consciousness but an awareness of self-consciousness, including the existential position of the author, both as a person and as an artist in relation to his own work as ironic, an objectification of that very self-consciousness. Schlegel thus treats self-consciousness with irony. As will be seen, Beethoven follows this process by undermining the type of self-conscious “voice” that Donelan convincingly demonstrates. This undermining of self-conscious produces Schlegelian Romantic irony, the continual chain of negation articulated by Kierkegaard.

In addition to self-consciousness, the concept of paradox is central to the understanding of Romantic irony outlined below. Both Spitzer and Sylvia Imeson have recently considered the presence of paradox within Beethoven’s late style, in particular the late quartets. Spitzer’s work – *Ambiguity and Paradox in Beethoven’s Late Style* – focuses on the theory that “Beethoven raises paradox to the second degree, so that it becomes not just a function of structure, but of the aesthetic in which the structure is comprehended”.<sup>71</sup> Although, as will be seen, this observation is confirmed in the analyses in the current work, Spitzer’s work raises several problematic areas.

The first of these is that neither paradox nor ambiguity is defined anywhere throughout the work. Spitzer hints that this lack of definition is necessary because of the subject matter:

I have nowhere attempted to *define* paradox. Umberto Eco says somewhere that the relationship between the structure of one metaphor and that of another is itself *metaphorical*: the same could be said *mutatis mutandis*, of paradox as well. We are dealing, then, with *forms* rather than form; with a set of family relationships instead of universal structure or algorithm.<sup>72</sup>

The reader is left to infer the manner in which Spitzer applies both “paradox” and “ambiguity” to Beethoven. However, it is difficult to establish in what sense the instances of paradox that are identified are actually paradoxical. Indeed many of these

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<sup>71</sup> Spitzer (1993) p. 28

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. p. vi

“paradoxes” only occur if the works are considered in light of assumptions arising from either conventional analytical distinctions of sonata form or from Schenkerian principles.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, many of the instances of ambiguity identified arise from assumptions regarding tonality drawn from Schenkerian analysis. Frequently, re-harmonisations of a theme within a work are considered to produce ambiguity because of the resulting “bi-tonality” within the harmonic structure of the theme.<sup>74</sup> However, in this case, as in that of the formal paradoxes identified, the “ambiguity” arises solely in light of latent analytical assumptions – there is no harmonic ambiguity actually present in either harmonisation.

The result of these assumptions may be seen most clearly within his analysis of the opening movement of the Op. 132 Quartet. He concludes that this movement actually consists of only eleven bars, which function as an “interruption, wedged between an introduction and a false reprise”.<sup>75</sup> This novel conclusion arises from the (inaccurate) observation that it is only in the development that the theme of the movement is heard fully, and is predicated on the assumption that:

Insofar as an exposition fulfils ideas adumbrated by the introduction, it is only here, in the middle of the development section, that the introduction ends and the exposition begins.<sup>76</sup>

The lack of a definition of paradox and ambiguity is particularly significant to this current study. As was seen above, Spitzer considers that, although paradox does occur in the music of Beethoven, irony does not. However, in neglecting to define paradox, he omits consideration of the relationship between the two phenomena, and thus it is

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<sup>73</sup> “The piece [the Op. 127 Quartet] simultaneously invites and resists analysis as a first-movement sonata form. In real terms the tension of the movement is dependent on the G minor section [which Kerman considers the second subject] being both a self-sufficient second group and a mere transition. The cogency of the paradox is due to each side being backed by convention (or at least by precedent).” *Ibid.* p. 114

<sup>74</sup> “Statements of the subject at original pitch clash with the background key. In other words, original-pitch ritornellos cut across the modulation to the dominant. The analysis must reckon, ultimately, with a “counterpoint” between Schenkerian tonicisation and Schoenbergian monotonicity.” *Ibid.* p. 299

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* p. 151

difficult to see in what way the paradoxes that he identifies are to be considered non-ironic. Similarly, this produces problems regarding the relationship between paradox and ambiguity. In many cases he uses the terms synonymously; in other instances the formal properties of one are attributed to the other. For example, he considers that “Schumann’s ambiguity differs from that of Haydn and Beethoven in that it is unresolved, exposed, incorporated into no system. It lacks the objectivity of convention. The paradox of Beethoven’s late style is similarly unresolved, but it is stated in conventional terms, and is therefore more authentically disturbing. It is more realistic”<sup>77</sup>. Similarly, “ambiguity in Schumann is a state, or an “atmosphere”, whereas in Beethoven it is the result of a dialectical process, an active contradiction”.<sup>78</sup> In both instances the formal properties are reversed: as will be seen, paradox always involves an active contradiction, whilst ambiguity is an unresolved state.

The relationship between ambiguity and paradox is of particular importance to this current study. As will be considered below, the elision of the two phenomena is by no means uncommon, and indeed often leads to an association of ambiguous effect with ironic intent. The result of this elision of the two phenomena is that every case of ambiguity could be considered ironic. Since Beethoven uses both ambiguity and irony in the late quartets it is therefore of particular importance to the current work to differentiate between them.

Imeson’s definition of paradox in *“The Time Gives it Proof” – Paradox in the Late Music of Beethoven* derives from an initial examination of the fields of myth, alchemy, psychology and literature. The element common to all of her examples – the paradoxes of death and rebirth, of sacrifice leading to reward, of male and female, good and evil, and the “contradictions of love” – is the simultaneous presence, or co-existence of contradictory or contrasting elements. Imeson argues that in all of these fields paradox

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid. p. 141

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. p. 47

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. p. 105



is used to express “transcendental” ideas – ideas that are unable to be expressed unequivocally.

In particular, she highlights the literary paradox of self-referentiality, which she considers “arguably most fascinating of all paradoxes found in literature”.<sup>79</sup> In such paradoxes artists “insert themselves into their own works in order to comment upon the nature of art itself, and the relationship between imitation and actuality”.<sup>80</sup> Self-referentiality is therefore a form of reflexivity - the process whereby the essential artifice of an artwork is expressed within the artwork itself. Within this process the relationship between paradox and irony is seen particularly clearly; in self-reflexive texts Imeson considers that

The ambiguities . . . are frequently reflexive ones, paradoxes which call attention to the nature of the text and to any underlying assumptions about what is normative for that type of text.<sup>81</sup>

The example she gives of such a reflexive text, Lawrence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, is consistently identified as ironic.<sup>82</sup> The manner in which Sterne “calls attention” to the “underlying assumptions” of the text through manipulation, distortion and exaggeration of literary norms results in the satirising of these norms. The reflexive process thus possesses a type of ‘corrective element’, characteristic of satirical irony. Imeson considers that this reflexivity is important to the aesthetic of Beethoven’s late style, linking his use of reflexive paradox to his relationship with Haydn:

In Beethoven’s op. 10 no. 3 can be seen clearly his interest in the compositional techniques of self-reference, and to a certain extent, the roots of these procedures in the reflexive approach to musical structure taken by Haydn. A special type of reflexivity, the paradox,

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<sup>79</sup> Imeson, Sylvia (1996) “*The time gives it prooffe*”: *Paradox in the Late Music of Beethoven* p. 28

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. p. 38

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, Bonds, Mark Evan (1991) “Haydn, Laurence Sterne, and the Origins of Musical Irony”, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, vol. 44 no. 1: 57 – 91, as well as Viktor Shklovsky’s famous Formalist reading (Shklovsky, Viktor Borisovich (1921) “Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*: Stylistic Commentary” in L.T. Lemon and M.J. Reis (eds.) *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (1965)).



came increasingly to occupy Beethoven; that which had been a witty means of introducing drama, surprise or humour into his musical fabric for Haydn became a more powerful and expressive instrument in Beethoven's hands . . . Beethoven used musical paradox as a structural tool.<sup>83</sup>

In addition, she does, briefly, relate the types of paradox and disruption that she identifies in the Op. 130 Quartet in particular to the concept of humour in Jean Paul Richter's *Vorschule für Ästhetik*. Disruptive humour, according to Jean Paul "annihilates both great and small because before infinity everything is equal and nothing"<sup>84</sup>, and it is through this annihilation that humour allows the creation of new forms. Imeson suggests that this may be the principle behind Beethoven's Op. 130: the disruption of form in this work is Richter's "sublime in reverse", forcing the creation of new genres through annihilating the old.

There are two important considerations with regard to Imeson's work. Firstly, with the exception of the literary examples, the examples of paradox that she draws from in order to arrive at her definition of Beethovenian paradox are perhaps not the most pertinent to Beethoven. Similarly, she relates the self-referentiality of Beethoven and Haydn to the Russian Formalist's process of *ostranenie* – "making strange". In both cases the theoretical work of Beethoven's contemporary Schlegel is perhaps more pertinent. As will be seen, the paradoxes Imeson analyses from the fields of literature, alchemy, myth etc., as well as her consideration of the annihilating humour of Jean Paul are all related to the type of existential paradox that lies at the philosophical heart of Schlegel's theoretical writing on irony. In addition, Schlegel specifically relates reflexive paradoxes to Romantic irony, referring to them as a device of "parabasis"<sup>85</sup>. Paradox and parabasis are essential elements of Romantic irony; therefore, the paradoxes and elements of paradox that Imeson identifies – reflexive devices, internal contradiction, contrast and multiple meaning – may be more directly related to Beethoven through the

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<sup>83</sup> Imeson (1996) p. 51

<sup>84</sup> Richter, Jean Paul (1804) *Vorschule für Ästhetik*, trans. Hale, Margaret R. (1973) *Horn of Oberon: Jean Paul Richter's School for Aesthetics* p. 88

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, Schlegel (1991) *Athenaeum* fragment 238 p. 50/51 and Schlegel (1963) p. 668.

philosophy of Romantic irony, than through other fields or the work of the Russian Formalists. The relationship between Beethoven and Schlegel provides a hermeneutic basis for considering such paradoxes within the composer's work, as indicators of Romantic Irony.

Secondly, throughout Imeson's work the same elision of ambiguity and paradox seen in Spitzer's work occurs. In the above quotation, for example, she describes the distortions in Sterne as both ambiguities and paradoxes. Indeed, she uses the two terms interchangeably throughout her discussion, culminating in her definition of "paradox" in relation to music as

covering phenomena in which some sort of reflexive device, internal contradiction, contrast, ambiguity or multiple meaning is employed in order to add a particular richness of detail or complexity of overall structure and symbolism. Unlike ambiguity, implicit in the idea of paradox is the notion of the potential resolution; the self-contradiction is only apparent, which permits a structure capable of expressing meaning that would be difficult or impossible to express in any other way.<sup>86</sup>

The association of ambiguity with paradox throughout Imeson's work is seen most clearly in this definition, and arises, in part, from the fact that she draws upon William Empson's seminal work *Seven Types of Ambiguity* in order to develop her understanding of paradox. She identifies musical paradoxes that correspond to Empson's types, and that resolve in the same manner, largely by substituting 'paradox' in place of Empson's 'ambiguity'. The theoretical problem that this produces is seen in the last portion of the passage above, where she states that paradox is potentially resolvable, whilst ambiguity is incapable of resolution.<sup>87</sup> The problem with this assertion is that, as will be seen, it is actually paradox that is inherently unresolvable, whilst the possibility of resolution in

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These fragments will be considered more fully in the next chapter.

<sup>86</sup> Imeson (1996) p. 53

<sup>87</sup> Implicit in a paradox is the possibility of its resolution; both halves of an idea, seemingly at irreconcilable odds with each other, are held together in a tensional synthesis in order to say something that cannot be expressed in any other way. At some point, there is a moment of epiphany, when the meaning of an expression such as "X and not-X" is clearly communicated, and is found to be richer than the acceptance of only one or the other. At some higher level, we hope to find that all of these small

the case of ambiguity is, in some ways, the actual definition of the phenomenon.

Examination of one of Imeson's own examples of paradox – the famous Liar's Paradox – suffices to demonstrate the point. This paradox arose in the sixth-century B.C. through the declaration of the Cretan prophet Epimenides that "All Cretans are liars". In this simple paradox may be seen the inherent unresolvability of all paradoxes – there is an opposition of two "truths" neither of which can be asserted without the negation of the other. This lack of assertion means that both are equally "true" and equally "false" – there is no possibility of resolution. As will be seen, whilst not all paradoxes involve the opposition of "truths", every paradox produces an unresolvable situation.

As will be considered in the final chapter of this work, the elision of paradox and ambiguity that occurs in both Spitzer and Imeson's work is common: it may also be seen, for example, in the work of Kerman,<sup>88</sup> Chua,<sup>89</sup> and Dahlhaus,<sup>90</sup> and, as will be seen in the final chapter of this work, of Muecke, Booth and Sheinberg. It is particularly important to differentiate paradox from ambiguity because of the correlation between irony and paradox that will be demonstrated in the third and fourth chapters. If paradox and ambiguity are considered to be correlatives, then any ambiguity could, in theory, be treated as ironic. The profound implications of this viewpoint for signifying systems, including music, will be seen below. Moreover, Beethoven's work, particularly the late quartets, demonstrates significant instances of both ambiguity and irony. Irony was, in fact, never central to Beethoven's compositional aesthetic – clearly a significant majority of his works display no trace of it. Therefore, those cases when it does occur are of special importance. Differentiating irony from ambiguity thus allows a fuller critical appreciation of the role of both within these important works.

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epiphanies, or fragments of meaning arising from local paradoxes will exhibit a converging pattern of structural and expressive significance." Ibid. p. 126/7

<sup>88</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 307

<sup>89</sup> Chua (1995) p. 229

<sup>90</sup> Dahlhaus (1991) p. 232

# Romantic Irony

The concept of “Romantic” irony originated primarily within the philosophical writing of the brothers Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel, two of the most important figures in early German Romanticism. August Wilhelm was far better known to the general public, largely because of his popular translations of Shakespeare, as well as for his criticism and public lectures. His philosophy, however, is in some ways derivative of Friedrich’s, his work popularising many of his brother’s conceptions. Indeed, Friedrich Schlegel’s philosophical thought was the more radical and influential, forming the basis for almost the entire philosophy of Romantic irony, and indeed of much of the emerging Romantic movement.

Friedrich Schlegel’s conception of Romantic irony is rather awkward: it does not readily fit into any standard division of ‘types’ of irony such as “verbal”, “situational”, “dramatic” or “general” irony. Rather, Romantic irony is best understood as a combination, or hybrid of such types: it is fundamentally an aesthetic (hence “verbal”) response to the perception of the essential “situational” irony of human existence. Muecke’s definition – “the irony of the fully-conscious artist whose art is the ironical presentation of the ironic position of the fully conscious artist”<sup>1</sup> – is perhaps the best place to begin the examination the concept. It demonstrates the three essential elements of Romantic irony – consciousness, paradox and parabasis in Schlegel’s terminology. This chapter will examine the philosophical basis of these elements first; the two following will demonstrate the manner in which Schlegel’s conception of irony is reflected within Beethoven’s quartets, focussing on Op. 132 and Op. 130/133 respectively.

## Consciousness

According to Schlegel, the foundation of all ironic art is consciousness, specifically the artistic *self*-consciousness. This is most clearly expressed in several fragments

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<sup>1</sup> Muecke, Douglas C. (1970) *Irony* p. 20

from the collections of fragments published as the *Lyceum* (1797) and as *Ideas* (1800)<sup>2</sup>. *Lyceum* fragment 42 is perhaps the most famous:

Philosophy is the real homeland of irony . . . there is a rhetorical species of irony which, sparingly used, has an excellent effect, especially in polemics; but compared to the sublime urbanity of the Socratic muse, it is like the pomp of the most splendid oration set over against the noble style of an ancient tragedy . . . [Romantic] poetry does not restrict itself to isolated ironic passages, as rhetoric does. There are ancient and modern poems that are pervaded by the divine breath of irony throughout and informed by a truly transcendental buffoonery. Internally: the mood that surveys everything and rises infinitely above all limitations, even above its own art, virtue or genius; externally, in its execution: the mimic style of an averagely gifted Italian *buffo*.<sup>3</sup>

Fragment 37 is more emphatic:

In order to write well about something, one shouldn't be interested in it any longer. To express an idea with due circumspection, one must have relegated it wholly to one's past; one must no longer be preoccupied with it. As long as the artist is in the process of discovery and inspiration, he is in a state which, as far as communication is concerned, is in the very least intolerable.<sup>4</sup>

Consciousness is also integral to *Ideas* number 69 - "Irony is the clear consciousness of eternal agility, of an infinitely teeming chaos".<sup>5</sup> (This fragment will be considered more closely in the context of the concept of paradox.)

The consciousness of the artist may be understood in two key ways. Firstly, artistic consciousness tempers inspiration by artistic control. The conscious artist establishes a distanced, or "surveying" viewpoint *over* his work, i.e. he "relegates it wholly to his past", rather than creating by "blurting out"<sup>6</sup> from *within* the work, whilst in the process of inspiration. This objective viewpoint of the processes of artistic creation results in "complete superiority, detachment, manipulation of the subject matter",<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The fact that Schlegel chose to write in a fragmentary form is itself related to his conception of irony, particularly the relationship between paradox and existence. This relationship is, however, beyond the scope of this current thesis: for a full explanation see Behler, Ernst (1993) *German Romantic Literary Theory* and Gasché, Rodolphe (1991) "Ideality in Fragmentation" in Schlegel, Friedrich (1991) *Philosophical Fragments* trans. Peter Firchow.

<sup>3</sup> Schlegel (1991) *Lyceum* fragment 42 p. 5/6

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. *Critical (Lyceum)* fragment 37 p. 4

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. *Ideas* no. 69 p. 100

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. *Critical (Lyceum)* Fragment 37 p. 4

<sup>7</sup> Wellek, René (1955). *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950. The Romantic Age* p. 15



with the result that the artwork becomes an object to the artist; he is conscious of the artifice of his own art.

Crucially, Schlegel's conception of artistic "consciousness" does not merely entail objective manipulation or control of the artwork or the awareness of its inherent artifice. Rather, it also encompasses an awareness both of the paradoxical and ironic nature of reality, and of the irony of the artist's own position within such a paradoxical reality. The irony of the artist's position is that all art, even ironic art that is aware of its own artifice, *is* essentially artifice. The irony of his existence (which will be considered more fully both below and in the fifth chapter) is what Muecke terms an "observable" irony: that of a victim, a finite being within an infinite, paradoxical universe.

Therefore, according to Schlegel, the conscious artist is able to view his art as an object, and to objectify the whole of existence by removing himself from that reality and observing it as though it were wholly in his past. Such a "*clear consciousness of eternal agility*", is an objectification of even the artist's own existence, allowing him to "survey everything and rise infinitely above all limitations, even his own art, virtue, or genius". Consciousness is, in essence, an *ironising* view.

Schlegel believed that a conscious artist transcends the paradox and contradiction of reality. In effect, he implies that to be conscious, to adopt an objective, ironic viewpoint is to be Godlike, since God's viewpoint is that of an ultimate ironist. To be ironic is, as in *Lyceum* fragment 42, to breathe the "divine breath", and to be conscious is to adopt, or more accurately mirror, God's consciousness. Adopting this "divine" ironic viewpoint allows the artist to free himself momentarily from the bounds of both his own art and his existence: it allows him to objectify art and existence before the "cosmic" irony of reality does.

Before considering the connection between artistic consciousness and Schlegel's philosophy of paradox, it is important to note briefly that Schlegel and the other early German Romantics considered Shakespeare, Cervantes and Goethe to be archetypal



conscious artists, whose works possess a high degree of irony. Significantly, E.T.A. Hoffman took pains to point out Beethoven's intrinsic consciousness, comparing him to Shakespeare, as well as to Haydn and Mozart (both of whose works have also been considered ironic).<sup>8</sup> Much of his discussion reflects Schlegel's conception of consciousness:

The truth is that, as regards self-possession, Beethoven stands quite on a par with Haydn and Mozart and that, *separating his ego* from the inner realm of harmony, *he rules over it as an absolute monarch*. In Shakespeare, our knights of the aesthetic measuring rod have often bewailed the utter lack of inner unity and inner continuity, although for those who look more deeply there springs forth, issuing from a single bud, a beautiful tree, with leaves, flowers and fruit; thus, with Beethoven, it is only after a searching investigation of his instrumental music that the *high self-possession inseparable from true genius and nourished by the study of the art* stands revealed.<sup>9</sup>

## Paradox

Paradox is of central importance to Schlegel's conception of irony. It forms the basis, not only of his philosophy of irony, and indeed of that of all the Romantics, lying at the heart of all his writing on irony, including, as considered briefly above, the concept of artistic consciousness. René Wellek acknowledges this when he defines the basis of Schlegel's irony as "his recognition of the fact that the world in its essence is paradoxical and that an ambivalent attitude alone can grasp its contradictory totality".<sup>10</sup>

The essence of Schlegel's philosophy of paradox may be seen in several fragments. The most important is *Lyceum* fragment 48:

Irony is the form of paradox. Paradox is everything simultaneously good and great.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See Bonds (1991) and Diener, Betty Sue (1992) *Irony in Mozart's Operas (Austria)*

<sup>9</sup> E.T.A. Hoffmann (1813) "Beethoven's Instrumental Music", in Leo Treitler (Ed.), (1998) *Strunk's Source Readings in Music History* p. 1195 (emphasis added)

<sup>10</sup> Wellek (1955) p. 14

<sup>11</sup> Schlegel (1991) Critical (*Lyceum*) fragment no. 48, p. 6. Note that the manner in which Schlegel defines paradox in this fragment – as simultaneously "good and great" – is somewhat unclear. "Good" has both Platonic and Kantian associations: for Plato "goodness" was a fundamental principle of reality – things were only real to the extent that they participated in the Form of the Good. Equally Schlegel's "good" may refer to either of the categories of moral or natural goodness, or more specifically to Kant's "categorical imperative" which essentially unites both. The key, perhaps, is the implied antithetical relationship of "good" to "great". "Great" seems to have Burkeian overtones: it is

In addition

Paradox is the *conditio sine qua non* of irony, its soul, its source and its principle.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, the last clause of fragment 69 from *Ideas* (quoted above) is important. In describing irony in relation to “an infinitely teeming chaos”,<sup>13</sup> Schlegel demonstrates his conception of the world as essentially paradoxical, composed of infinitely contradictory realities the effect of which, according to this fragment is chaotic.

Within these fragments irony is clearly defined in terms of paradox: paradox is the essential element of irony, and every paradox, it seems, will produce an ironic form. The key to this, however, is the consciousness of the paradox and irony. Irony is the “clear consciousness” of the “eternal agility” of the irony itself; it is the consciousness of the “infinitely teeming chaos” that is the result of a paradoxical, contradictory universe. Against the backdrop of such a paradoxical, chaotic reality man is understood as a finite being, struggling to comprehend the infinite. Schlegel and the Romantics understood Man’s position within the universe in terms of the situational dramatic irony of the stage: that is, man is considered to be the victim of a cosmic irony.<sup>14</sup> As Muecke points out, although they were not the first to comprehend this paradox of reality, perceiving it as ironic did originate with the Romantics.

Within Schlegel’s conception of an infinitely paradoxical, chaotic universe, not only is man himself considered as a finite being, but every human “reality” is also understood as finite, as a “closed” order or, in other terms, as an artifice. As

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one of the characteristics that he continually ascribes to the Sublime. As such, “great” may mean something that is dark and terrible i.e. that induces the fear that is characteristic of the Sublime. Within this context “good” may be taken to mean the opposite, without specifying Schlegel’s precise meaning. Regardless of this problem, the important point from this fragment for the current work is the relationship between irony and paradox.

<sup>12</sup> Schlegel (1957) *Literary Notebooks 1797-1801* ed. Hans Eichner p. 114

<sup>13</sup> Schlegel (1991) *Ideas* no. 69, p. 100 (emphasis added)

<sup>14</sup> This conception is reflected in Hegel’s perception of life as art: “I live as an artist when all my action and my expression in general, in connection with any content whatsoever, remains for me a mere show and assumes a shape which is wholly in my power”. Hegel, G.W.F. (1835). *Aesthetics*:

Frederick Garber explains, Schlegel thought that, in order to exist in such a paradoxical vacuum, humans construct closed realities, which he termed “systems”, within which we attempt to function; we “manipulate experience by making models of order which are fully subject to our wishes”.<sup>15</sup> The irony of this process is that systems are nothing other than “privileged fictions, untenable images of order that have no effective relationship to the world where they are supposed to be applied”.<sup>16</sup>

Schlegel’s answer to this paradox is itself paradoxical: “It’s equally fatal for the mind to have a system and to have none. It will simply have to decide to combine the two”.<sup>17</sup> This impossible combination of system and non-system is achieved through art: the artist overcomes the irony of existence through irony. In essence, ironic artistic creations are analogues of the paradoxical and ironic structure of the universe. Such utterances are themselves ironic, since, according to Garber, they “make independent cosmoses that seek both to mirror reality and to stay aloof from it”.<sup>18</sup> In adopting an ironic position on the irony of life, the artist creates structures that can be seen as ironies of life, i.e. ironies of irony. Irony is therefore, as in Schlegel’s *Lyceum* 48, the form of both the paradoxical universe and of paradoxical, ironic artworks.<sup>19</sup>

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*Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox (1975) p. 65

<sup>15</sup> Garber, Frederick (1988) *Sterne: Arabesques and Fictionality* p. 35.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Schlegel (1991) *Athenaeum* fragment no. 53, p. 24

<sup>18</sup> Garber (1988) p. 35.

<sup>19</sup> Garber’s explanation of this process is exceptional, so I quote it in full:

“The ironists found their answer [to the irony of existence] by seeking out and working with the potential fecundity of chaos, and that approach took the form of an impersonation of the forces which threaten the constructs set up by the mind. In this way the ironist could do precisely what Schlegel had proposed, that is, have a system and not have one, both at once. What the ironist offers is a skilful mimicry of that anarchy which is always out there, ready to swallow up all the fixities of human experience. In so doing he shows how the mind can turn the threat of disintegration onto the matter of high art. Order and disorder, control and chaos, exist simultaneously, all guided by the mind which is so free and so masterly that it can show off its strength and creativity by making an image of the most profound threat to its freedom. The ironist offers himself as a victim (irony always needs a victim) but he is, in fact, a victor, however tentative and temporary his triumphs are. His work is characterised by a combination of autonomy and lucidity which leads him to a profitable complicity with chaos. His authority is demonstrated by the authorial sovereignty of which Sterne found telling instances in Cervantes, and which is exemplified further in the creativity of Tieck, Byron and Hoffmann, among others. Romantic irony is the product of a self-consciousness aware of both the proximity of chaos and the strength of artifice.” Ibid. p. 38

Schlegel's philosophy of paradox thus reflects the dichotomy of the finite and the infinite, the ultimate meaninglessness of fixed human constructs in an infinitely chaotic universe. Moreover, he demonstrates the value to both life and art of recognising the inherent artifice of such systems. The ultimate irony of this philosophy however is that even the "system without a system", the ironising of the paradox of existence in art by the conscious artist, results ultimately in another artificial system. Schlegelian irony may therefore be understood as a never-ending progression from the position of ironist to that of ironised.

This continual alternation between ironist and ironised, finite and infinite reflects the relationship between Romantic irony and transcendental philosophy, specifically post-Kantian idealism. Romantic irony, as seen, relates art to existence, aesthetics to metaphysics and ethics – it is essentially a philosophical viewpoint.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, this relationship is perhaps the central concern of all of Schlegel's philosophy. He sought to overcome the difficulties that he perceived in Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy through a union of philosophy and art that he termed "transcendental poetry".

There is a kind of poetry whose essence lies in the relation between ideal and real, and which therefore, by analogy to philosophical jargon, should be called transcendental poetry. It begins as satire in the absolute difference of ideal and real, hovers in between as elegy, and ends as idyll in the absolute identity of the two.<sup>21</sup>

Such transcendental poetry should, like transcendental philosophy, contain "the producer along with the product"<sup>22</sup> and a description of transcendental thinking within the system of transcendental thoughts: "in all its descriptions, this poetry should describe itself, and always be simultaneously poetry and the poetry of poetry".<sup>23</sup>

Schlegel's description of transcendental poetry is clearly related to Fichte's

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<sup>20</sup> Indeed, as will be seen in the fourth chapter of this work, the "existential" basis of Schlegel's Romantic irony is derived not only from post-Kantian idealism, but also from the Socratic irony of Plato's writing.

<sup>21</sup> Schlegel (1991) *Athenaeum* fragment 238 p. 50/51

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.



“subjective” development of Kant. Although Schlegel largely rejected Fichte’s system, the “existential” basis of his irony may nevertheless be connected to the concept of reflexivity, or reflective thought, from Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*.<sup>24</sup> Fichte argued against the separation of the self from actuality that originated from Kant’s reliance upon the concept of the “thing-in-itself” by rejecting this concept altogether, proposing instead the notion of the “self-positing I”.<sup>25</sup> He considered that the self and the external world are actually one and the same thing: consciousness is self-positing, but it also posits actuality. This complicated process may be described in terms of two ‘drives’: the first towards the infinite, and the second towards the finite. The first ‘practical’ drive is “unbounded self assertion”<sup>26</sup>, through which the self-positing “I” is obliged to reach out towards the infinite, seeking to subject everything to its own autonomous laws. This movement towards the infinite is opposed at every turn however, by the ‘theoretical’ drive, which Fichte termed “reflective thought” – self-contemplation that effectively transforms the infinite, self-positing self into a finite, bounded entity.

There is therefore a constant tension, indeed contradiction between these two drives, a constant process of self-positing and self-limiting, of self-assertion and self-destruction; in other words, a continual paradox. From this continual movement

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Schlegel’s famous comparison of Fichte’s philosophy to both the French Revolution and Goethe’s *Meister* (Schlegel (1991) *Athenaeum* fragment 216, p. 46) should suffice to demonstrate his relationship to Fichte’s system.

<sup>25</sup> Indeed, Kant’s concept of the “thing-in-itself” relates directly to Schlegel’s writing on irony in two important ways. Firstly, Kant’s system irrevocably separates the self from the world – the “thing-in-itself”. Our knowledge contains an inherent inability to know anything about the “thing-in-itself”. This results from the conditions of our knowledge, which, according to Kant, are defined and delimited by the limits of our empirical experience. The “thing-in-itself” is unknowable as a phenomenal reality: since we can never *experience* it we can therefore know nothing about it; we are forever distanced from the world as it is in itself. However, the existence of the “thing-in-itself” must be ‘thought’, as a necessary pre-condition for our representation and reason.

This is closely related to the second issue, the “illusion of the unconditioned”. According to Kant our knowledge is, by definition, conditional and synthetic. However, the process of our reason leads us, inescapably, to seek beyond the conditions of our knowledge for the unconditioned that makes all conditions valid. There is therefore, within the process of our reasoning a continual movement from the conditional towards the unconditional, a continual antithesis between finite and infinite. Crucially, this dichotomy cannot be avoided, despite our awareness of it: it is intrinsic in the manner in which reason functions. Both of these issues therefore produce a distinction between the “finiteness” of human knowledge and reason compared to an infinite that is forever beyond our perception or understanding – an inherently ironic situation.

<sup>26</sup> Fichte, Johann Gottlieb (1802) *Science of Knowledge (Wissenschaftslehre)* p. 192

between finite and infinite results 'imagination': "the source of all presentations and hence the locus of the physical world".<sup>27</sup> Actuality is therefore posited as a synthesis from the continual motion between thesis and antithesis embodied in the process of reflective thought. It arises from the perception of the subjective consciousness: in a sense, therefore, all knowledge is actually self-knowledge.

Schlegel's transcendental poetry introduces Fichtean reflective thinking – the 'immediate union of being and looking'<sup>28</sup> – into Romantic art, producing within it a dialectic of the finite and infinite which parallels that embodied in Fichte's system. It is a continuous process of self-creation and self-annihilation, a constant antithesis, a constant paradox. Moreover, it is continually self-reflexive, containing both poet and poem. Crucially, however, as may be seen in the fragments above, Schlegel describes this transcendental poetry in terms of irony, and his description of irony as a "continuously fluctuating between self-creation and self-destruction"<sup>29</sup> makes this relationship between his irony and Fichtean philosophy explicit. Thus, the transcendental basis of Schlegel's philosophy – the paradoxical, self-reflexive dialectic between finite and infinite, real and ideal – is conceived as fundamentally ironic. His philosophy of irony thus relates not only to art, but also to ethics and especially to metaphysics: Schlegel's irony forms a fundamental philosophical viewpoint.

It is important to stress the infinite process of this irony. (Indeed, in the following chapters I will argue that this infinite process not only distinguishes Schlegel's irony from concepts such as wit and humour, but also that the process of Beethoven's Op. 132 quartet may be understood as a correlate of this infinite reflective process.) The infinite, never-ending nature of the paradoxical, reflective process of Romantic irony is seen clearly in many of Schlegel's figurations – "infinitely teeming chaos", an "endless series of mirrors" and the "continuous" alternation of creation and destruction.<sup>30</sup> However, his longest discourse on irony actually demonstrates this

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. xviii

<sup>28</sup> Behler, Ernst (1993) *German Romantic Literary Theory* p. 138

<sup>29</sup> Schlegel (1991) *Athenaeum* fragment 51 p. 24, also *Critical (Lyceum)* fragment 37 p. 4

<sup>30</sup> Ernst Behler highlights this infinite process. He considers that for Schlegel "poetic reflection" was



infinite process. In "On Incomprehensibility" he describes the paradoxes of the "irony of irony", which occurs

If one speaks of irony ironically without in the process being aware of having fallen into a far more noticeable irony; if one can't disentangle oneself from irony anymore . . . if irony turns into a mannerism and becomes, as it were, ironical about the author . . . if irony runs wild and can't be controlled any longer.

What gods will rescue us from all these ironies? The only solution is to find an irony that might be able to swallow up all these big and little ironies and leave no trace of them at all. I must confess that at precisely this moment I feel that mine has a real urge to do just that. But even this would be only a short-term solution. I fear that if I understand correctly what destiny seems to be hinting at, then soon there will arise a new generation of ironies: for truly the stars augur the fantastic . . . Irony is something one simply cannot play games with. It can have incredibly long-lasting after effects.<sup>31</sup>

The infinite nature of Schlegel's conception of irony – the constant cycle from irony towards ironised – is described by Hegel as "infinite absolute negativity", a never-ending process of destruction that undermines not only of the basis of human existence, but also of art:

The ironical, as the individuality of genius, lies in the self-destruction of the noble, great and excellent; and so the objective art-formations too will have to display only the principle of absolute subjectivity, by showing forth what has worth and dignity for mankind as null in its self-destruction. This then implies that not only is there to be no seriousness about law, morals and truth, but that there is nothing in what is lofty and best, since, in its appearance in individuals, characters, and actions, it contradicts and destroys itself and so is ironical about itself . . .

But if irony is taken as the key-note of the representation, then the most inartistic of all principles is taken to be the principle of the work of art. For the result is to produce, in part, commonplace figures, in part, figures worthless and without bearing, since the substance of their being proves to be a nullity.<sup>32</sup>

Hegel's rejection of Schlegel's philosophy is based primarily upon only his own

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"inseparable from the creative process, animating the entire poetic work, and blending the author's artistic creation with his critical, theoretical discourse". Crucially, however, "such a reflection is of course infinite and can be exponentiated to ever higher powers". (Behler, Ernst (1990) *Irony and the Discourse of Modernity* p. 60)

<sup>31</sup> Schlegel, Friedrich (1800) "On Incomprehensibility" in Wheeler, Kathleen M (1984) *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: the Romantic Ironists and Goethe* p. 37 It is interesting to note that in this essay Schlegel states that irony "is to be found everywhere in [the Athenaeum]" (ibid. p. 36), and yet this discourse on irony actually takes place within the Athenaeum. Although it occurs in essay form, this passage may therefore be taken as an incidence of the irony of irony – the commentary on irony actually participates in or produces a dialectical spiral of irony, involving the conscious ironising of an artist who speaks ironically about irony.

<sup>32</sup> Hegel (1835) p. 67/8. Hegel's exposition of Schlegel's philosophy of irony that precedes the

belief in the intrinsic worth of “the lofty, the beautiful” etc.<sup>33</sup> Rather than actually refuting Schlegel’s conception of these as finite, artificial human constructs, he simply insists upon the opposite - the “moral and true” and “inherently substantial content”.<sup>34</sup> Hegel was unable to reconcile himself to Schlegel’s view, so he simply denies it any worth, insisting that it leads to the negation of art (whilst ignoring the fact that Schlegel’s models of artistic irony were Shakespeare, Cervantes and Goethe).

It is important to consider however, that whilst Hegel rejected Schlegel’s conception of irony and paradox as a process of infinite negation, Romantic irony may also be understood in an entirely opposite manner. Significantly, Lowry Nelson considers that Schlegel’s “Unendlich vollen Chaos” represents a process that “characteristically stresses the positive, generative notion of chaos as productive and fruitful, with cosmogenic pre-Socratic and Platonic overtones”,<sup>35</sup> the process which Sheinberg refers to as “infinite creation”, an “eternal process of affirmation”.<sup>36</sup> In other words, according to Nelson, the paradox of Romantic irony occurs not as a Hegelian process of infinite negation, but rather as a positive, creative force.

This perception of paradox as a generative force will be considered in the fourth chapter of this work. Within that chapter Schlegel’s conception of paradox will be placed within a larger philosophical context and will be seen to relate to a form of irony known as “general” or “existential” irony: indeed, his Romantic irony may be considered a development of these other forms. Significantly, this relationship will also be seen to be reflected within the corpus of Beethoven’s quartets: general, existential irony may be seen within two important movements – the Cavatina from Op. 130, and the Grosse Fuge Op. 133.

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quoted passage is particularly brilliant.

<sup>33</sup> In other words, his argument reflects the dichotomy of aesthetics vs. ethics.

<sup>34</sup> Hegel (1835) p. 67/8

<sup>35</sup> Nelson, Lowry Jr. (1988) “Romantic Irony and Cervantes”, in *Romantic Irony*, ed. Frederick Garber p 18

<sup>36</sup> Sheinberg, Esti (2000) *Irony, Satire, Parody and the Grotesque in the Music of Shostakovich: A Theory of Musical Incongruities* p. 62

## Parabasis

According to Schlegel “Irony is a permanent parabasis”<sup>37</sup>. This conception demonstrates the manner in which Schlegel considered that the ironic paradox of reality and the consciousness of the artist affect the artwork. Parabasis is a type of dramatic device, referring specifically to an interlude in the midst of a comedy by a chorus that claims to speak in the author’s name. The effect of this was a momentary shift of focus from the “reality” of the play towards the reality of the play as an artwork, i.e. as an artifice. According to Nelson, “Schlegel’s universalising of the term as permanent or continuous defines that aspect of his general conception of irony which calls for the author’s explicit control and willed intervention”.<sup>38</sup>

As considered above, the conscious artist establishes an objective, ironic viewpoint over the paradox of both life and art: the essence of Schlegelian parabasis is the perception of the permanent presence of such an ironic artist within the artwork. That is, the artist’s ironic manipulation of the artwork, which demonstrates both his own consciousness and his control over the work, is understood as corresponding to the actual presence of the artist *within* the work. This “presence” is an extension of the momentary representation of the author by the device of parabasis. The effect of this parabasis is that, through ironic manipulation of the artwork, the conscious artist mirrors both the irony of existence, including the irony of his own artistic position, and the artifice of art.

Thus, in an ironic work, the artist’s control over the work - the process of creation - becomes part of the subject of the work itself. This process foregrounds both the subject of the work and the entire work’s existence as artifice, which, according to Schlegel’s conception, parallels the artifice of every system within a paradoxical reality. As Muecke explains, “the only possibility open for a real artist is to stand apart from his work and at the same time incorporate this awareness of his ironic position into the work itself and so create something which will, if a novel, not

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<sup>37</sup> Schlegel (1963) p. 668

<sup>38</sup> Nelson (1988) p. 17-18

simply be a story but rather the telling of a story complete with the author and the narrating, the reader and the reading, the style and the choosing of the style, the fiction and its distance from fact, so that we shall regard it as being ambivalently both art and life".<sup>39</sup>

Two concepts which writers on irony have consistently identified with Romantic irony – “aesthetic distance” and the “destruction of the aesthetic illusion” – may be understood as deriving from ironic parabasis. “Aesthetic distance” describes the effect caused by parabasis - the objectification of the process of composition within the work itself. The resulting perception of the artifice of the work prevents the content of that work being apprehended on its own terms. In a “Classical” narrative structure we engage purely with the content of that narrative, in some sense, as reality: in Schlegel’s terms, we willingly confine ourselves within the defined boundaries of the narrative “system”. In an ironic narrative we become aware, not only of the content of the narrative, but also of the process of the narration. The perception of narration violates the boundaries of the narrative system, preventing the acceptance of the narrated as a reality. The narrative becomes, instead, an artifice, and as such is regarded as an object, rather than as a reality.

“Aesthetic distance” is frequently the point of departure for consideration of irony in musical discourse. For example, in separate articles Brauner<sup>40</sup>, Heinz Dill<sup>41</sup> and Longyear<sup>42</sup> each sought to identify individual elements that indicate the presence of irony in musical discourse. Essentially, however, all these writers focus on “aesthetic distance” within the work as the locus of irony. Mark Evan Bonds’ refers more specifically to the creation of *two* closely related types of “distance”: distance between the composer and his work and between the listener and that same work.<sup>43</sup> The first of these is effectively the result of parabasis: the disruptive/manipulative presence of the composer establishes “distance” between composer and composition

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<sup>39</sup> Muecke (1970) p. 20

<sup>40</sup> Brauner (1981)

<sup>41</sup> Dill, Heinz J. (1989) “Romantic Irony in the works of Robert Schumann”, *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 73.

<sup>42</sup> Longyear (1970)

within the work. The second may, on the one hand, be considered to be a result of this parabasis: the perception of the composer's presence draws attention to the artifice of the work, violating the 'suspension of disbelief'. However, the opposite is also true: the composer's "presence", his distance, is a result of the perception of the listener. Thus, the "aesthetic distance" between the reader and the work and between the composer and the work are really two sides of the same coin.

The technique of the "destruction of aesthetic illusion", frequently associated with Romantic irony, is consistently identified as one of the most important ways in which aesthetic distance is achieved: it is often considered to be *the* locus of such irony. In fact, such violation of illusion is an effect of parabasis: according to Schlegel the "self-infliction" of parabasis "is not ineptitude, but deliberate impetuosity, overflowing vitality . . . *the most intense agility of life must act, even destroy*; if it does not find an external object, it reacts against a beloved one, against itself, against its own creation".<sup>44</sup> Tieck's techniques of displaying the conventions of the stage, which destroy the aesthetic illusion, making the audience conscious of seeing a play are an example of this. In the following example, from his *Der Gestiefelte Kater* [*Puss in Boots*] the characters Leutner, Schlosser, Fischer and Müller are critics within an on-stage audience, witnessing the play. The author and the machinist have just had an on-stage conversation concerning the stage machinery *after* the curtain has risen for the beginning of the third act. This caused confusion among the critics in the audience and so Jackpudding, the court jester, attempts to repair the situation:

JACKPUDDING. Excuse me if I make so bold as to deliver a few words which actually don't belong to the play.

FISCHER. Oh, but you ought to remain perfectly silent. You've already displeased us in this play, and still more now –

SCHLOSSER. A Jackpudding presumes to talk with us?

JACKPUDDING. Why not? For if I'm ridiculed that doesn't bother me. Indeed, it would be precisely my warmest wish that you laugh at me. So don't be embarrassed.

LEUTNER. That's rather droll.

JACKPUDDING. Of course, what little becomes the King is all the better suited for me. For this very reason he refused to come out at all and left this important announcement to me.

MÜLLER. But we don't want to hear anything.

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<sup>43</sup> Bonds (1991)

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Behler (1990) p. 84



JACKPUDDING. My dear German countrymen –

SCHLOSSER. I believe the play is set in Asia.

JACKPUDDING. Now, however, I'm talking to you as mere actor to the spectators.

SCHLOSSER. People, I'm done for; I'm insane.

JACKPUDDING. Please realise, though, that the previous scene [the conversation of the Author and Machinist], which you just saw, doesn't belong to the play at all..

FISCHER. Not to the play? But then, how did it get into it?

JACKPUDDING. The curtain was lifted too early. It was a private conversation which wouldn't have occurred on stage at all if space weren't so disgustingly tight in the wings. If you laboured under the illusion, that would indeed be even worse. Do be so good, then, as to eradicate this deception in yourselves; for from now on, - understand me, only after I've gone off, - the act will actually begin. Between ourselves, everything which has preceded plays no role in the affair. – But you shall be compensated; there will, in contrast, soon come a number of things which very much pertain to the matter. I've spoken to the author himself, and he has given me his word.<sup>45</sup>

Throughout the example, indeed throughout the entire work, Tieck constantly manipulates the aesthetic illusion of the “reality” of the onstage work. The presence of the author, machinist and prompter draw attention to the “machinery” of the onstage play in the same way that a serious mistake in a recital diverts the attention from the music onto the performance – the aesthetic illusion of the performance is destroyed.

Tieck though further distorts this process. When Jackpudding addresses the audience of the play “as mere actor to the spectators”, he clings to the characteristics of the fool, opposing this to the serious character of the king, in order to justify this address. In effect he is at once both character and actor, which produces a similar blurring of the distinction between play and “reality”.

Tieck uses this juxtaposition of play and reality to produce a satire on certain critical philosophies of art. The onstage critics are portrayed as demanding “taste”, heightened emotionalism and the beautiful, by which they generally mean gross stereotypes and conventional dramatic devices. Thus the fact that throughout the work they are unable to judge either between the events of the play and the numerous intrusions of “reality”, or between characters and “actors”, may be taken as satirical.

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<sup>45</sup> Tieck, Ludwig (1797) *Der Gestiefelte Kater*, trans. Gerald Gillespie (1974) pp. 98-101

In particular it may be seen as a satire of the view encapsulated in one of Hegel's complaints against Romantic irony:

For this reason, after all, on the part of irony there are steady complaints about the public's deficiency in profound sensibility, artistic insight, and genius, because it does not understand this loftiness of irony; i.e. the public does not enjoy this mediocrity and what is partly wishy-washy, partly characterless. And it is a good thing that these worthless yearning natures do not please; it is a comfort that this insincerity and hypocrisy are not to people's liking, and that on the contrary people want full and genuine interests as well as characters which remain true to their intrinsic worth.<sup>46</sup>

*Der Gestiefelte Kater* may be understood as possessing levels, or layers of irony. The satire on criticism constitutes one level, whilst the effect of displaying the "machinery" of the play, and its juxtaposition with "reality" – the destruction of aesthetic illusion – may be taken as another. The effect of parabasis, however, is found in a third level of irony – the objectification of the second level. The blurring and juxtaposition of the onstage "system" - the play - and "reality" occurs *within a play*, i.e. as a system. The onstage destruction of aesthetic illusion objectifies the artifice of the actual play: through observing the ironic destruction of illusion, the audience is made aware of the aesthetic illusion they are currently participating in. The result of this is that the act of *watching* a play is objectified.

This process, however, also objectifies the *creation* of the work, since the awareness of an artifice automatically implies the presence of an artist. Moreover, in this case the artist will also be perceived to be not only conscious of the irony of the aesthetic illusion, but also ironic towards it. The destruction of aesthetic illusion and the presence of the artist within the artwork are *subjects* of the actual work, the ironic treatment of which has the effect of objectifying these same processes in the actual work. This objectification is understood as the ironic "presence" of the artist, the essence of Schlegelian parabasis.

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<sup>46</sup> Hegel (1835) p. 68 Note that although Hegel earlier implies that Tieck knew nothing of irony, it appears that he knew enough to satirise the view expressed above over thirty years before Hegel

Two significant points must be considered regarding parabasis and the philosophical foundation of Romantic irony. The first of these is that, whilst Schlegel refers to devices of parabasis as a demonstration of the “artist’s presence” within an artwork, it is important to realise that these devices establish the presence, not of the artist himself, but of a *narrator*. Such a narrator may, to a greater or lesser extent, provide a substitute for an authorial “voice”; nevertheless, such a presence will always be, in essence, an artifice.

Lowry Nelson demonstrates this point: “The sovereign power of the writer, the self-reflexiveness of both writer and work, the wit, urbanity and irony with which a work may be suffused, all suggest a strong but complex presence of manipulatable tone that may be attributed to the author-in-charge or to the controlling narrator or speaker”.<sup>47</sup> In other words, the devices of parabasis and other manipulations of the work *create* the presence of the “author”, which must therefore be understood as an artifice. Thus, the “presence of the artist” cannot be perceived as the “authentic” voice of the actual composer, but must actually be considered as a narrator.

The identification of the artist’s “presence” or “voice” within a work as a narrative artifice is particularly significant with respect to musical discourse, especially within the context of Beethoven’s late quartets. In musical discourse the “narrator” is often latent: the simple existence of a narrative system actually indicates the presence of a narrator; because of this, such utterances are often considered the “direct” utterance of the composer. However, Bonds demonstrates the manner in which Haydn began to manipulate narrative devices to produce an ironic effect, which he considers to parallel that of Sterne.<sup>48</sup> As I will demonstrate below, in his quartet Op. 132, Beethoven goes even further than this, manipulating even the “artist’s presence” – in effect he ironises the artifice of his own “narrator”.

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penned it. In other words, as A.W. Schlegel stated, Tieck had foreseen the reader’s “tacit objections” and responded to them with irony.

<sup>47</sup> Nelson (1988). p. 23

<sup>48</sup> Bonds (1991)

The second point regarding the philosophical basis of Romantic irony is more fundamental: techniques and devices of parabasis alone, particularly the destruction of aesthetic illusion, cannot be considered to constitute or indicate the presence of Romantic irony. Wellek makes this particularly significant point with regard to Schlegel's conception of irony. He states that Schlegel did not necessarily consider the "interference of the author in his work, in the deliberate breaking of the illusion"<sup>49</sup> to be ironic *in itself*, and that he never identifies the devices of parabasis used by Tieck, Brentano, Hoffmann and Heine, as constituting irony alone. Indeed, Wellek points out that Schlegel never considered works by these artists to be realisations of his philosophy; "Goethe, Shakespeare and Cervantes were his ironists, not his fellow romanticists".<sup>50</sup>

Raymond Immerwahr makes a similar point; "Romantic irony" now has a different meaning than it did for Friedrich Schlegel. According to him, "the term is most commonly applied nowadays to the drastic violation of illusion by reference within a literary work to its author and the process of its creation, to the transgression of the boundary which separates our level of reality as readers of a book or as audience in a theatre from the reality of the characters in that book or play".<sup>51</sup> Immerwahr states that when Schlegel does praise such techniques of parabasis he refers to them, not in terms of irony, but rather of "arabesque". (Examples include Sterne, Diderot's *Jacques le Fataliste*, and Jean Paul.) Schlegel's definition of arabesque is "a form characterised by involutions, complex and seemingly aimless digressions, and wanderings back and forth between temporal and spatial settings as well as between levels of narrative reality. This last, the device generally called Romantic irony, is thus to be seen as one element of what Schlegel terms the arabesque".<sup>52</sup>

Contrary to Immerwahr's view however, Schlegel's arabesque may best be understood, within the context of his whole work, as a specific manifestation of

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<sup>49</sup> Wellek (1955). p. 15

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p. 15

<sup>51</sup> Immerwahr, Raymond (1988) *The Practice of Irony in Early German Romanticism* p. 82

Romantic irony, rather than vice versa. Frederick Garber, like Immerwahr, connects the devices of parabasis in Sterne to Schlegel's "arabesque". However, he demonstrates that in essence arabesque is an analogue of chaos: "a skilled semblance of chaos"<sup>53</sup>. As has been seen above, Schlegel considered the paradox inherent in an "infinitely teeming chaos" as intrinsically ironic.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, if the artistic structure of an arabesque mirrors this chaos, it demonstrates the artist's ironic consciousness of paradoxical reality: arabesque is an inherently ironic form.

Nevertheless, Immerwahr's point is important – parabasis alone is not Romantic irony. As has been seen, devices of parabasis are related, whether through arabesque or not, to irony, but only because they demonstrate the consciousness of the artist, a consciousness that has its basis in Schlegelian paradox. As Muecke notes, Schlegel's identification of the paradox of reality as ironic was an original, and fundamentally Romantic view. As such, it is this concept that is the essence or foundation of Romantic irony, in both philosophy and practice. Parabasis may be taken as a general indicator of irony, but it is the combination of parabasis with paradox that is central to Romantic irony.<sup>55</sup>

This distinction may be seen within the example from Tieck's *Der Gestiefelte Kater*. The devices of parabasis within this work may be seen in much older works such as Aristophanes' comedies or certain soliloquies in Shakespeare. However, the manner in which such devices are used by Tieck to create paradox is new: the continual parabasis produces "worlds within worlds" i.e. levels of "realities" or systems. Each of these successive realities becomes objectified in a continual process from ironic to ironised, "reality" to "artifice", and it is the paradox created by this infinite process that makes the irony of this work specifically Romantic.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p. 84

<sup>53</sup> Garber (1988) p. 36

<sup>54</sup> Schlegel (1991) *Ideas* 69 (see quotation above)

<sup>55</sup> As indicated in the opening chapter of this thesis, it is at this point that the conception of Romantic irony given here differs from those of Longyear and, to a lesser extent, Hatten. Longyear's analysis of Beethoven's 'Romantic' irony essentially focuses on moments of parabasis – on disruptions and disjunctions within the music – and refers to paradox only briefly. As such, these ironies tend to be limited to specific moments in the discourse – quite the reverse of Schlegel's "permanent parabasis". This type of irony is therefore really "rhetorical", rather than "Romantic" in Schlegel's sense.



This understanding of paradox, and its relationship to parabasis as the foundation of Romantic irony, clarifies the relationship between Romantic irony and the final, specific element of parabasis remaining to be considered: A.W. Schlegel's identification of the juxtaposition of "comic" and "serious" modes as an ironic technique. This element of parabasis played such an important role in A.W. Schlegel's understanding of irony that it has led Raymond Immerwahr to consider the juxtaposition of comic and tragic to be *the* locus of Romantic irony. The philosophical basis of this technique will be considered here in some detail because it will prove to be important to the following analysis of Beethoven's Op. 132 Quartet.

According to A.W. Schlegel's *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, the juxtaposition of comic and tragic in Shakespeare is a result of the artist's "superior", i.e. ironic viewpoint. He considered that Shakespeare was above all a conscious artist, possessing "the indifference of a superior mind, which has run through the whole sphere of human existence and survived feeling".<sup>56</sup> From this superior, ironising position Shakespeare allows what August Wilhelm refers to as "an occasional glance at the less brilliant side of the medal":<sup>57</sup> a demonstration of the contradictory, irremediably flawed reality of life, of "the almost inevitable influence of selfish motives in human nature"<sup>58</sup>, in other words of paradox.

Significantly, this "occasional glance" may be regarded as a device of parabasis, a demonstration within the work of the artist's freedom, the artifice of his art, and, above all, the paradox of reality.

He [Shakespeare] makes, as it were, a sort of secret understanding with the select circle of the more intelligent of his readers or spectators; he shows them that he has previously

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<sup>56</sup> Schlegel, August Wilhelm (1808) *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* trans. John Black (1883) p. 369 Significantly, as will be seen in the next chapter, Beethoven had access to this work shortly before the composition of the Op. 132 quartet.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

seen and admitted the validity of their tacit objections; that he himself is not tied down to the represented subject, but soars freely above it; and that, if he chose, he could unrelentingly annihilate the beautiful and irresistibly attractive scenes which his magic pen has produced.<sup>59</sup>

Here Schlegel specifically considers the juxtaposition of serious and comic elements to be the result of the objective consciousness of the artist, of his ironic view. This juxtaposition is an annihilation of the aesthetic illusion of the beautiful: comic scenes undermine or destroy the illusion created in serious or tragic scenes. He considers that this effect is heightened when the comic scene is a parody of the preceding serious scene, or when a character's favourable self-presentation is immediately juxtaposed with another's less flattering opinion. According to Schlegel, such juxtaposition of comic and serious can only be understood in terms of irony: "the mixture of such dissimilar, and apparently contradictory, ingredients, in the same works, can only be justifiable on principles reconcilable with the views of art, which I have already described [i.e. the ironic in art]".<sup>60</sup>

However, it is important to consider that ironic juxtaposition of opposed modes is not limited purely to the opposition of comic vs. serious. Nelson's definition of Friedrich Schlegel's irony demonstrates an expansion of the concept to include other oppositions:

In general one can say that irony for Schlegel, in his early and widely influential poetics, is a concept that entails a hard-won harmony among vastly diverse elements, a glorifying in infinity and plenitude, an artistic mastery over contemporaneously opposed modes of the serious and the playful, of the exalted and the mundane, a fusion of the artful and the natural, and a recognition of the presence of a sovereign personality in the work.<sup>61</sup>

As Wellek suggests, for August Wilhelm irony may have been centred on the comic, because comedy most effectively destroys the aesthetic illusion of the serious.<sup>62</sup> For Friedrich Schlegel, however, the juxtaposition of comic and serious was one of many oppositions and contradictions that comprise the paradox of reality. The significance

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. p. 370

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. p. 371

<sup>61</sup> Nelson (1988) p. 22

for the current work is therefore that juxtapositions of other oppositional genres etc. may be used as devices of parabasis.

The expansion of this concept from the opposition of comic and serious is paralleled in the development of irony in musical discourse. Bonds demonstrates how humour, and its juxtaposition with the sentimental in a process of unexpected disruptions and returns, was used by Haydn to create ironic distance: comic devices are used to undermine the aesthetic illusion of the serious or sentimental, thereby creating a sense of ironic distance. Humour thus “betrays the presence of the composer”.<sup>63</sup>

Longyear expands the technique of ironic juxtaposition when he demonstrates that Beethoven’s juxtapositions of “prosaic” and “poetic” that interrupt a mood, and, significantly, particularly in “sharply contrasting movements”, achieve the same destruction of illusion.<sup>64</sup> Finally, Dill demonstrates a similar technique in Heine’s famous “sting in the tail”, comparing this to Schumann’s creation of an illusion that is subsequently destroyed by “a change of tone, a personal comment, or a violently contradictory sentiment”.<sup>65</sup> In such cases the juxtapositions are not limited merely to comic vs. serious, but rather include other opposed topics or elements.

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<sup>62</sup> “Comedy is the more perfect the more vivid is the illusion of our purposeless play and unlimited caprice.” Schlegel, A.W. (1808) p. 273, quoted in Wellek (1955) p. 53

<sup>63</sup> Bonds (1991) p. 78

<sup>64</sup> Longyear (1970) p. 655

<sup>65</sup> Dill (1989) p. 173

Immerwahr's definition of Schlegel's irony as "all the ways . . . by which a creative writer calls attention to the paradox and flux inherent in the universe and in human communication, including works of art, and to the impossibility of any "definitive" creative work"<sup>66</sup> highlights the three elements discussed above – consciousness, paradox and parabasis. Before demonstrating the manner in which these elements (which comprise the philosophical basis of Romantic irony) may be seen within Beethoven's Op. 132 Quartet it is important to first consider the manner in which the analysis of irony will be approached. In particular, the relationship between irony and musical discourse must be examined. The approach used below centres upon two conceptions: firstly, that irony, in all its forms, may be understood in terms of one fundamental structure of opposed, incongruous elements; secondly, this structure invariably produces the effect of objectification. Consequently it is this objectifying process that will be considered to define irony throughout this thesis.

### The Structure of Irony

In relation to the structure and function of irony used in this work, three key elements are drawn from Esti Sheinberg's extensive work on musical irony. The first of these relates to the manner in which irony may be identified within artistic discourse. In common with many writers she considers structural incongruities to be the primary indicator of irony,<sup>67</sup> and she suggests several criteria for the identification of musical irony in terms of such incongruity. According to her, the following characteristics may be used to convey irony in music:

1. Stylistic incongruities within one governing style
2. Stylistic discontinuities within one governing style
3. Incongruities with available information about the composer's set of convictions, beliefs, values, or about his personal characteristics
4. Incongruities based on meta-stylistic norms, e.g. rendering a feeling of 'too high', 'too fast', 'too many repetitions' etc., not when measured relative to a certain style or

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<sup>66</sup> Immerwahr (1988) p. 84

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Bonds (1991) p. 64/65, Cook, Nicholas (1993) *Beethoven: Symphony Number 9* p. 103, Dill (1989) p. 174/175, Hatten (1994) p. 174/175, Muecke (1969) *The Compass of Irony* p. 19-23, all of whom identify irony in relation to incongruity.

topic, but per se

5. Shifts between levels of musical discourse

6. Juxtapositions of more than one stylistic or topical context, none of which could be regarded as 'governing'.<sup>68</sup>

With the exception of the third criterion the above will be used in this work to identify irony within Beethoven's quartets. The implicit assumption of this third criterion is that the viewpoint expressed in an artwork must always be congruent with the artist's own, since any incongruity would result in irony. As a result this criterion is somewhat unconvincing because it makes no allowance for the fact that the relationship between artist and work is often unquantifiable: an artist may express an opinion or viewpoint that is contrary to his own views, or that may even be morally repellent to him, for aesthetic ends other than irony. Whilst it is certainly the case that an artist could take such a position in order to satirise the viewpoint expressed, the satire will only be successful if an incongruity of any of the other types listed occurs within the structure of the work. Without structural incongruity no irony will occur; the expressed viewpoint could be understood as an "authentic" authorial viewpoint.

Incongruity between a work and its extra-textual context, however, can indicate irony. For example, incongruity may arise between a given work and either the prevailing stylistic milieu or other of the composer's works. As will be seen in the fifth chapter of this work, Beethoven's use of musical conventionality in the replacement finale of the Op. 130 Quartet may be understood, when compared to the other quartets, to be ironic. In such instances, however, the incongruity occurs primarily within and between the works, with secondary reference to the biographical details of the artist's life. The resultant irony is therefore based upon incongruity perceptible within the discourse.

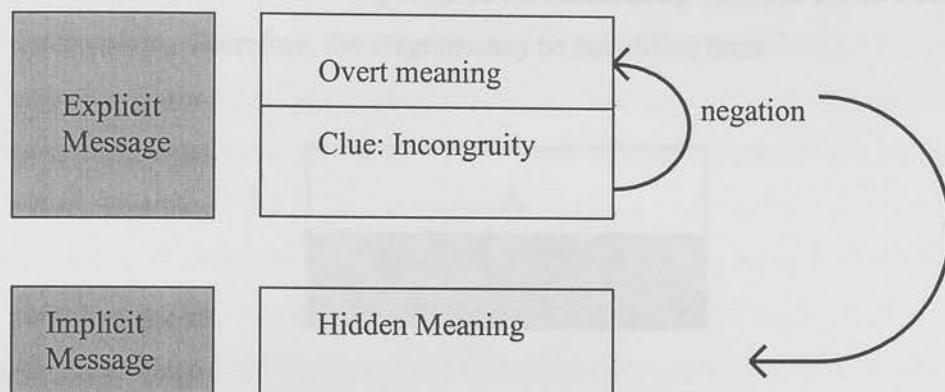
Sheinberg's general approach to irony is perhaps the most fundamental element used within this work. In essence, her conception of irony is based upon a structural approach; the structure of irony she proposes, given below, is understood firstly as a cultural unit, i.e. as a semiotic unit, and secondly as a discursive structure. In other

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<sup>68</sup> Sheinberg (2000) p. 64



words, irony is understood as an independent structure, similar to an ‘idea’ in the Hegelian sense, that has an existence of its own, separate from any discursive manifestation. This structure may subsequently be manifested within any signifying system (whether language, music, visual arts etc.).



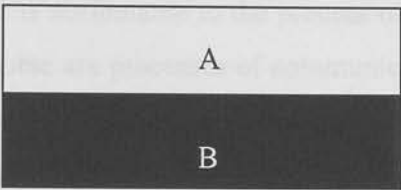
The final element drawn from Sheinberg’s work concerns the manner in which this basic structure is related to discourse, including music. This relationship is based on the concept of correlation, which she develops from Hatten’s approach. She argues that the structure of irony actually functions as a cultural unit, and that this structure may be correlated to discursive structures that share the same structural properties. Thus where the structure of irony occurs as a discursive form then, rather than simple analogy, the structure may be understood *as irony*. This approach is of particular importance in relation to musical discourse. If a musical structure displays this same structural property then it is possible to establish a correlation between this structure and that of irony, regardless of the semantic contents of the specific discourse.

The fact that the key correlation is in the structure and not in the content allows an easy application to non-verbal modes, such as music. Consequently, a musical structure that encompasses co-existing incongruities can be regarded as a correlative of the cultural unit of ambiguity [i.e. irony].<sup>69</sup>

Essentially this structural approach to irony is used throughout the course of this work, with two modifications. The first relates to the actual structure of irony.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. p. 16. Note that, despite the use of the term “ambiguity”, Sheinberg actually refers, from the context of the passage, to the structure of irony. Indeed, she considers irony and ambiguity as correlatives or synonyms. The problems inherent in this viewpoint will be considered in the final chapter of this thesis.

Whereas Sheinberg separates the ‘hidden meaning’ from the ‘incongruous elements’ within her diagram, I will remove this distinction. The incongruous elements in the structure do not point to a hidden meaning; rather, they form at least part of that meaning. The incongruity inherent in an ironic structure is not a separate element of the structure, but is rather a quality of the relationship between the two elements of the structure. Therefore, the diagram may be simplified thus:



In this diagram, the two elements of the structure (‘A’ and ‘B’) are incongruous, and yet co-exist within a greater meta-structure; this fundamental incongruity creates the irony. In simpler ironies, for example in satire, one of the elements will be preferred over the other, the rejected meaning becoming the victim of the irony. However, more complex forms of irony such as Romantic irony and “general” or “existential” irony may also be understood in terms of this structure. As will be seen in the fifth chapter, although such forms involve additional discursive levels, all forms of irony can be reduced to the same fundamental incongruous structure.

**Objectification**

Secondly, I suggest that, although irony may be considered as a structure of simultaneous difference and incongruity, an additional element is needed. This additional element is the process of objectification, and it is in this process that the locus of irony is to be found. What makes a discourse ironic is not simply the presence of an incongruity, but the objectification of one element of the incongruous structure by the other that results.

The process of objectification forms the basis for the analysis of irony throughout this thesis. This concept derives from the work of Bakhtin, functioning as part of the

“dialogical relationship” that he proposes as the subject of the “meta-linguistic” analyses in his *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. His conception of the manner in which artistic discourse functions is often complex, even elusive, but is of particular importance to this work. Central to his theory is the “word”. This ‘word’ is not the unit of language that normally occurs as the subject of linguistic analysis. Rather, the Bakhtinian ‘word’ always implies the embodied utterance of a person or character: the ‘word’ and the speaker are inseparable.<sup>70</sup> This association of an utterance with a speaker is attributable to the process of narrativity described above: since all forms of discourse are processes of communication, the presence of such a communication implies the presence of an author. The result is that the utterance embodies, to a greater or lesser extent, the point of view of the implied author. (It is important to note, however, that the “author” of an utterance is an artifice implied by the inherent narrativity of all discourse.)

Bakhtin identifies three types of “word”, according to the manner in which each relates to the implied author. The first is described as the “direct, linear, fully significant word”<sup>71</sup>, which functions as a “direct authorial word”<sup>72</sup> – the expression of the author’s “ultimate semantic authority”.<sup>73</sup> This type, known as the “single-voiced word”, “denominates, informs, expresses or represents, and is intended for direct, object-oriented comprehension”.<sup>74</sup> It is the utterance of one author, with one object or purpose, and it is in this mode that most speech and communication occur.

The second type is the “objectivized word”, the utterance of a represented character within a discourse. According to Bakhtin, such words do have the same type of direct, object-oriented meaning as words of the first type. However, this second type of word “does not lie in the same plane with the author’s speech, residing instead at a

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<sup>70</sup> “In order to become dialogical, logical and concrete semantic relationships must be embodied, i.e. they must enter into a different sphere of existence: they must become a *word*, i.e. an utterance, and have an *author*, i.e. the creator of the given utterance, whose position is expressed. In this sense every utterance has its author, who is heard in the utterance as its creator. We can know absolutely nothing about the actual author as he exists outside the utterance.” Bakhtin (1929) p. 152

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p. 156

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. p. 159

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. p. 156

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. p. 154

perspective distance from it. It is not only understood from the point of view of its object, it itself becomes an object as a characteristic, typical or picturesque word".<sup>75</sup>

This second type of word therefore introduces the process of objectification, whereby one viewpoint, one "word" becomes the object of the discourse of another. In the represented speech of a character there are essentially two 'speech centres' – those of the character and the implied author. The character's word, however, is entirely subordinate to that of the author, occurring as an element of the author's discourse. Thus although there are two "voices" present, the word of the represented character occurs solely as the object of the author's discourse.

Whereas in "single-voiced" words the objectified utterance of the represented character is subservient to that of the author of the discourse, in a "dialogical relationship" the objectified word is not subsumed within the author's. Rather, the presence of two different authorial voices simultaneously within one discourse results in a dialogue, *within* that discourse, between the respective "words". Bakhtin terms the resulting phenomena, containing such dialogical relationships, "double-voiced words".

This third type of word varies according to the character of the dialogical relationship between the "voices". In all cases, however, the author makes use of another person's utterance for his own purposes. He does this by "inserting a new semantic orientation into a word which already has - and retains - its own orientation. In that case such a word, by virtue of its task, must be perceived as belonging to another person. Then the two semantic orientations, two voices, are present in a single word".<sup>76</sup> The most significant point for the current discussion is that all forms of double-voiced word involve the objectification of one voice by another:

We know that objectivisation is to a certain degree inherent in all words of the third [double-voiced] type.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid. p. 154

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. p. 156/157

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. p. 164

Indeed, the process of objectification is essential to the double-voiced word: according to Bakhtin, if the “word” of the other person does not occur as an objectified word then the two “voices” in the dialogue will tend to merge - the double-voiced word will revert to a single-voiced type. The result of this will be that the dialogical relationship will not be perceived.

Bakhtin’s analysis of stylisation demonstrates the dialogical relationships present in “double-voiced” words:

The stylister uses another person’s word as another person’s thereby casting a slight shadow of objectification on that word. The word does not, however, become his object. The body of devices of another person’s speech is important to the stylister precisely as the expression of a particular point of view. He works with the other person’s point of view. Therefore a certain shadow of objectification falls on that point of view itself, and as a result it becomes conditional (*uslovnoe* - i.e. no longer absolute or independent - trans.). . . the conditional word is always a double-voiced word.<sup>78</sup>

In stylisation, the author shares the same purpose as that of the original speaker. As such, the dialogical relationship between the two “voices” is essentially one of agreement. The styling author uses the other person’s “word” for the express purpose of representing the presence, the viewpoint, of another person. It is the relationship between his own viewpoint and that of the “other person’s word” that is important to the stylister.<sup>79</sup>

Where stylisation produces a dialogical relationship of agreement, other cases of double-voiced words – Bakhtin specifically identifies irony and parody<sup>80</sup> – create hostile relationships within the word. In such cases the author forces the voice of another to say things that are contrary to that original speaker’s viewpoint. This produces an incongruity within the structure of the ‘word’, resulting in the ridicule or

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid. p. 157

<sup>79</sup> Stylisation differs from imitation in that in imitation there is no sense of the “otherness” of the original speaker’s “voice”, no process of objectivisation: rather, there is essentially one merged voice. In contrast, in stylisation, even though the two voices agree, they remain two different voices. Similarly, the difference between stylisation and the second type of “word” - the objectivised word - is that, although in the second type of word there are two “voices” present (the author’s and the character’s) there is no dialogical relationship between them - one functions entirely as a represented object within the other.

<sup>80</sup> “The ironical use, and in general any ambiguous use of another person’s word, is analogous to the parodistic word, since in such cases the other person’s word is being used to communicate aspirations



ironising of the original viewpoint.

The approach to irony used in this work derives from Bakhtin's understanding. All forms of irony, whether discursive or non-discursive, will be understood essentially as dialogical relationships. In other words, in every irony there is a process of objectification, whereby one viewpoint becomes the object of another. The quality of this objectification may vary according to the "aim" of the utterance, whether stylisation, satire or parody. Nevertheless it is this process that, as will be seen, defines irony.

Although Bakhtin deals exclusively with discursive forms of irony, the same approach may be applied to "non-verbal" forms such as situational or dramatic irony. For example, the irony of the pickpocket having his pocket picked, cited by Muecke as a situational irony,<sup>81</sup> may be explained in terms of the objectification of systems. The pickpocket's world is a system; it represents reality from his viewpoint. However, the fact that he is having his pocket picked, even as he carries out his theft demonstrates to the observer the artifice of his system. In such cases the system is viewed as "reality" from one viewpoint and simultaneously as an artifice from that of the surrounding incongruous context. Since the system is revealed as an artifice it becomes objectified – the victim of irony.

The basic philosophy of Romantic irony may likewise be understood as objectification. As considered above, existence was considered to be fundamentally ironic because of the paradox created by the incongruous co-existence of "systems" – man made, fictional realities that are perceived, by those that created them, as, in some sense, an actual reality. The incongruity created by the paradoxical co-existence of opposed artificial "realities" however, may be understood as objectification: the artifice of all the systems becomes objectified by their incongruous juxtaposition.

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which are hostile to it." Ibid. p. 161

<sup>81</sup> Muecke (1970) p. 8

This understanding of irony may be demonstrated through the analysis of the “dramatic” irony in the example from Tieck’s *Der Gestiefelte Kater*. In this example, the satire on criticism is achieved through the onstage parabasis. The critics’ world, in which the onstage ‘reality’ is perceived as part of the play, and the actors are confused with characters, is a fictional reality. The juxtaposition of this system with the onstage “reality” objectifies the critics system, demonstrating the artifice of that system. The effect of this is not only that the critics’ reality but also the philosophies that they express throughout the work is seen to be an artifice. As a result they become objectified, the victims of satirical irony.

Tieck’s play was, however, considered to be Romantic irony because of the element of paradox. As considered, the onstage destruction of illusion objectifies the artifice of the actual play. The artifice of the onstage play objectifies that same system – the aesthetic illusion – in *all* plays, including, crucially, the actual play (i.e. Tieck’s own work) through the process of self-reflexivity. This produces paradox because the context of the *actual* play had previously rendered the *onstage* play an artifice: the objectifier thus becomes the objectified. This creates a never-ending progression from “reality” to “system”, in which each reality is eventually seen to be an artifice. This contradictory cycle effectively mirrors the paradox of existence that is the basis of Schlegel’s philosophy. Romantic irony is fundamentally a discursive form whereby the artifice of discursive systems is objectified by paradox and contradiction, thereby mimicking the fundamental ironic paradox of existence. The important point, however, is that this aesthetic response may be understood in terms of the same process of objectification outlined above.

Finally, it is important to consider that, whilst discursive forms of irony such as dramatic and Romantic irony will be approached in terms of the structure outlined above, this structure will be understood with regard to objectification i.e. as the embodiment of a dialogical relationship. The incongruity inherent in the structure of irony produces a process of objectification either within one of the elements or, as in Romantic irony, in both. This objectification gives the ironic utterance the quality of a dialogue: there will be a relationship between the objectified element(s) of the

structure and the remaining term. In all cases of irony this relationship will be, in Bakhtin's terms, hostile.

As a result, as will be considered more fully in the following two chapters, the process of objectification seen within all irony may be understood, in essence, as a process of preferencing. Within dialogical relationships the objectified element is always subservient to the non-objectified term, i.e. the 'viewpoint' of the non-objectified element is always preferred over that of the objectified 'word'. As will be seen, such preferencing negates the objectified element: it becomes the victim of irony.

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### **Music and Objectification: Convention and Self-reflexivity**

It is important to briefly consider the manner in which the process of objectification can occur within music. This is necessary because of an issue that is raised most clearly with Muecke's consideration of musical irony. According to Muecke, one of the difficulties an ironic composer faces is that "to be ironic is to be ironical about *something*".<sup>82</sup> However, since he considers that music is essentially a non-representational art, he concludes that musical discourse is therefore not well suited to irony. Muecke seems to suggest, following Eduard Hanslick, that music can signify only music, not "what people say, think, feel, and believe . . . the area within which irony operates".<sup>83</sup> Lacking a referent, music therefore lacks anything that can become the object of irony.

However, if music is more referential than Muecke supposes then the potential for irony increases. Since music may signify extrageneric connotations, it is possible

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<sup>82</sup> Muecke (1970) p. 4 emphasis added

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. p. 7

that thoughts, beliefs etc. can become musical content.<sup>84</sup> For such occurrences to be ironic, though, requires that such extrageneric “meanings” occur not simply as the subject, or the content of the discourse, but rather as objects, i.e. as in some sense objectified ‘victims’. The discourse must, as Muecke insists, be ironic *about* them. The manner in which this objectification occurs is therefore of importance in producing or understanding musical irony.

Muecke’s comments actually indicate two important ways in which music can produce objectification: through the use of conventions and through the process of self-reflexivity. In both these cases musical structures can occur as objects within the discourse. He considers that a common musical “language” makes ironic distance possible, since it can provide an object for an ironist – “one piece of music can ‘comment’ ironically upon another or upon some other musical style or convention and this by means of parodic exaggeration or distortion or by incongruous juxtaposition or ‘quoting’”.<sup>85</sup> For example, he considers that the *Marseillaise* in Tchaikovsky’s “1812” Overture represents “France, in or after the revolution”, and that the composer’s subsequent treatment of the theme is ironic.

Muecke’s “language” of music, which allows the possibility of irony through parody, may be understood essentially as the conventions of musical discourse. As Umberto Eco demonstrates, all communication processes, including language, are based upon socially-established convention.<sup>86</sup> Any common musical language will therefore, by definition, be established in terms of such social convention. Significantly, such musical conventions may be treated as objects within a piece: in other words, they become susceptible to ironic manipulation.

This understanding of the relationship between musical convention, objectification and irony can be seen to be at the root of Dill and Bonds’ respective work on musical

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<sup>84</sup> Recent semiotic studies like Hatten’s have suggested that by cultural convention music can be correlated with such extrageneric connotations or meaning. More generally, topic theories such as Leonard Ratner’s suggest entire systems of such correlations.

<sup>85</sup> Muecke (1970) p. 6

irony. According to both writers, the aesthetic illusion created by a composer is thoroughly conventional, indeed often banal: Dill refers to this initial conventionality in terms of Heine's manipulation of clichés;<sup>87</sup> Bonds discusses Haydn's use of heightened (i.e. exaggerated) conventionality in order to achieve ironic "distance" in the "Surprise" Symphony.<sup>88</sup> In both cases the "aesthetic illusion" of these semantic conventions is subsequently exposed, objectifying the conventionality of the previous discourse.

Two types of convention will be of particular importance to the analyses that follow – "generic" conventions and "work-specific" conventions. As Bonds argues, conventions of genre – for example formal structures such as sonata form – act in a similar manner to narrative conventions, providing a framework both for composition and for "reading" the discourse.<sup>89</sup> Manipulation of these very general conventions can therefore direct attention from the content of a work to the technique of composition, objectifying the compositional conventions of the genre.

The infamous finale of Haydn's "Joke" quartet Op. 33 no. 2 may be seen to be an example of such manipulation. A seemingly conclusive perfect cadence occurs in bar 148 – a clear convention of closure, which the fermata that follows seems to confirm. The adagio that follows therefore comes as a surprise, undermining the closure implied by the preceding cadence. This effect is repeated at the end of the adagio – its closure is undermined when Haydn re-introduces the beginning of the main theme. The repetition of the theme is distended by progressively longer rests, which destabilise the effect of the meter. Finally, when the *beginning* of the theme is used to finish the movement there is a paradox of beginning and ending, closure and non-closure.

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<sup>86</sup> "Every attempt at attempt to establish what the referent of a sign is forces us to define the referent in terms of an abstract entity which moreover is only a cultural convention." Eco, Umberto (1976) *A Theory of Semiotics* p. 66.

<sup>87</sup> Dill (1989) p183

<sup>88</sup> Bonds (1991) p. 71

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. p. 70



144 (Presto) Adagio

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

151 Presto

1

G.P.

1

G.P.

G.P.

G.P.

160

1

G.P.

G.P.

166

3

G.P.

3

3

G.P.

3

pp

pp

pp

pp

The second type of convention is the “work-specific” convention. According to Bonds, establishing and subsequently violating a pattern is an important element in

the ironising, i.e. objectification of generic conventions.<sup>90</sup> Such “patterns” are essentially established through repetition, as unique conventions reiterated within the individual work. Like generic conventions, these work-specific conventions function as narrative structures, producing a framework for the “decoding” of the discourse. Similarly, the manipulation of these conventions can also produce aesthetic distance, resulting in objectification and irony.

The first theme of the finale of Beethoven’s Quartet Op. 18 No. 6, generates such work-specific conventions, dictating much of the movement’s subsequent course and character. The joyful, euphoric effect of this theme results from a combination of elements: the triple time and tempo tend to indicate a basic “dance” topic, augmented by the untroubled B flat major key. In addition, the syncopated, *sforzando* accents of the first two bars add elements of cross-rhythm, increasing the rhythmic energy, whilst the staccato articulation and persistent semiquaver motion of the first violin produce a light but vigorous *moto perpetuo* effect.

Ex. 2.2 Beethoven Op. 18 no. 6 finale

44 Allegretto quasi Allegro (♩ = 88)

The musical score shows four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The key signature has two flats (B-flat major). The time signature is 3/8. The tempo is marked 'Allegretto quasi Allegro' with a note indicating a quarter note equals 88 beats per minute. The first violin part is highly active, with a continuous semiquaver line and staccato markings. The other instruments have more rhythmic, syncopated parts with dynamic markings of piano (p) and sforzando (sf).

In the course of the movement these work-specific conventions are subjected to ironic manipulation and objectification. The first occurrence begins at bar 60, where the theme occurs in what appears to be a simple modulation device – an ascending sequence – combining with the crescendo to produce harmonic/dynamic momentum. Bars 67 and 68 represent the fourth phase of this sequence, which in itself perhaps suggests a certain exaggeration of the sequential function: there is almost an implication of the sequence going too far. Nevertheless, this objectification is increased by the *sf* dominant seventh on the second beat of bar 68, which abruptly

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. p. 71ff

interrupts the fourth phase of the sequence on what should have been its final note. The sustained dominant seventh harmony and the hemiola effect produced by the repetition of the four-note melodic figure in bars 68 to 71 suspend both the harmonic and melodic momentum of the preceding bars. This produces a sudden stasis, a disruption of momentum which is fundamentally opposed to the most basic conventions of the movement – the perpetual motion and “dance” basis of the theme.

Ex. 2.3 Op. 18 no. 6 finale  
(Allegretto quasi Allegro)

60

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

68

Nevertheless, the fact that this sudden stasis actually develops from the perpetual motion of the theme may be understood as an objectification of this work-specific conventions, an ironic reversal of function. This objectification is compounded by the objectification of the modulation device itself. The stasis on F dominant seventh halts the upward sequential progress of the previous bars, forcing the music towards the tonic key. This produces the paradoxical situation of a modulation process that doesn't actually modulate, an ironic reversal that objectifies the conventions of the device. (Indeed, this opposition is actually seen within the relationships of the parts in this passage. Throughout the course of the “sequence” the cello remains on an F, producing an opposition between this static, immovable bass pedal and the upward sequential motion of the three upper parts.)

Finally, the manner in which the stasis of these bars forces the theme back to the tonic produces an objectification of one of the generic conventions of the rondo. In a conventional rondo form, the main theme invariably appears in at least one contrasting key. Throughout this entire movement, however, the theme is prevented from appearing in any key other than the tonic. This produces an abnormal emphasis on the tonic – an objectification and reversal of convention.

Bars 137-150 intensify the ironic objectification of the modulation device seen in this example through exaggeration of both the semantic structure of the theme and the modulation process. Although the harmonic and dynamic momentum generated by the earlier modulation device is not particularly incongruous with the conventions of the movement, that of bars 137 to 150 *is*. The ascending sequence continues for too long, going too far by extending to a full octave. The harmony of these bars moves too far away, increasing in pace between bars 147 and 149, whilst the dynamics become too intense, extending to *sforzando* in a *fortissimo* dynamic level. This produces a complete breakdown of the sequence, culminating in the sudden rupture of the texture in bar 150. The fermata entirely halts the music, producing a stasis even more pronounced than in the first example.

The irony of these bars is essentially the same as that of the earlier modulation – an objectification, through exaggeration, of the conventions both of the theme itself and of the modulation device. Here though, the irony is more pronounced. The conventions of the theme destroy their own “aesthetic illusion” – they objectify themselves.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> It is important to state that the irony identified in these examples is not Romantic irony. These passages are used simply to illustrate the manipulation of generic and work-specific conventions; they do not produce the continual “infinite” process of Romantic irony that will be seen in the late quartets. Rather, the simple undermining of convention in these instances produces reversals that are finite in effect. Thus where there is irony in these examples, it tends to be satirical or corrective in effect: “jokes” aimed at mocking the unwary listener as much as “exposing illusion”. In the following chapter I argue that, as a result, this “irony” is much closer to Muecke’s conception of “Proto-romantic irony”, and that such instances should actually be considered in terms of concepts such as wit and humour.

(Allegretto quasi Allegro)

[illegible]

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Significantly, the objectification of such “work-specific” conventions creates the possibility for self-irony: the process known as self-reflexivity. In such a case the composer creates a work whose own established conventions are subsequently treated ironically within the same discourse, resulting in a process of self-irony or self-reflexivity. This self-reflexivity occurs in the ironic treatment of the conventions in the above examples, causing the conventions of the discourse to become an object for their own discourse. Dill’s consideration of Schumann’s self-reflexivity, however, demonstrates that there is an additional objectification process involved. He defines self-reflexivity as “the reflection about poetry in the poetic work itself”,<sup>92</sup> considering Schumann’s use of quotation, specifically self-quotation, as such a device. According to Dill, this self-quotation may be understood as a process whereby music may comment upon itself – the composer’s own music becomes an object within his discourse. However, in doing so the process of composition itself is objectified – the objectification of a previous discourse destroys the “aesthetic illusion”, both of that discourse and, by implication, of the

<sup>92</sup> Dill (1989) p. 172



compositional conventions of the new discourse. This establishes an ironic distance not only in relation to the self-quotation, but also in relation to the conventions of the current work. The process of self-reflexivity, in other words, is an objectification, not only of the individual work, but also of the process of composition itself, albeit almost by implication.

It may also be seen that other types of irony will produce an element of self-reflexivity. Parodies, for example, objectify the conventions of either a work, an individual artist or a style. This objectification may be understood, however, as an objectification not only of the conventions themselves, but of the process of their creation – a parody of Haydn objectifies his compositional procedure. In objectifying the compositional process of the parodied composer, the ironic composer, by implication, also objectifies his own process of composition, even if unintentionally. Through parody he reveals the artifice of his own art, demonstrating the possibility that it too may be subject to parody. In Schlegelian terms the parodist demonstrates “both sides of the medal”, i.e. the artificiality both of the parodied system and of the system he has himself constructed. In effect the self-reflexivity inherent in parody produces, simultaneously, system and *non*-system.

Self-reflexivity is therefore directly related to Romantic irony. The objectification of the process of the composition within the work itself results in a paradox: the work is seen to be simultaneously art and artifice, system and non-system. This self-reflexive paradox is effectively a process of self-irony – an objectification of the artifice of all art, including the artist’s own work. As such, self-reflexivity functions as a device of parabasis, drawing attention to the ironic consciousness of the artist, and reflecting this consciousness within the work itself. Self-reflexivity therefore relates to all of the essential elements of Romantic irony.

As will be seen in the analysis of Beethoven’s Op. 132 Quartet the continual presence of parabasis and ironic paradox produce a self-reflexive function, a continual objectification resulting from incongruities both within and between the movements of the work. These movements not only reflect the consciousness of the

paradox of art and artifice within their structure, they also self-objectify. This mix of paradox, parabasis and self-reflexivity produces a structure that correlates with the infinite process of creation and destruction, assertion and negation. It produces an irony that informs not simply moments of the work, but pervades its entire structure, resulting not only in the fragmentation of the musical “surface” and the destruction of illusion, but also in fundamental paradoxes within the “deep” structures of the work. This work produces, in other words, a powerful Romantic irony.

The connection between Beethoven and the Schlegels may be considered from two overlapping perspectives, the first is “literary” – through reading their work, or the second, of those concerned with things the connected through personal contact with their other characters. The first important literary connection between Beethoven and the Schlegels was through Shakespeare. That Beethoven read Shakespeare is well documented, that alone through the composer to certain devices of “dramatic” music, particularly the projects considered in the previous chapter. However, in a letter to Thomas Mitchell in May 1818, Beethoven indicates that he had read Shakespeare in A.W. Schlegel and Tick’s translation.<sup>1</sup>

This direct literary connection is strengthened by the possibility that Beethoven also read A.W. Schlegel’s *Lectures on Dramatic Art*, which he may have become acquainted through his close friend Karl Joseph Bernard, editor of the *Wiener Zeitung*. Bernard appears extensively throughout the correspondence books, but in one entry listing from late September (1814) he notes that he possessed a copy of

<sup>1</sup> “I have not enough such service to Shakespeare from their copies of them, as before there is no reference for Beethoven about their works. The translation is entitled ‘Shakespeare’ or ‘Shakespeare’s Works’ which is not the best of names, but I have made them through Shakespeare’s translation of them.”

<sup>2</sup> Wagner, *Beethoven* (1961) The Edition of Beethoven, Vol. 1 p. 274.

## Irony, Wit and Humour

Before considering Beethoven's Op. 132 quartet in terms of Romantic irony it is important to demonstrate the hermeneutic basis – the historical context – for this analysis. Firstly, the chain of influence between the composer and the Schlegel brothers, and hence between Beethoven and the concept of Romantic irony provides the basis for considering Beethoven's work in terms of this fundamental Romantic conception. Secondly, the relationship between Schlegel's Romantic irony and the phenomena of humour and wit will be considered. This has a direct bearing upon the Beethoven quartets: the irony of these works is a development of the wit and humour of Mozart and Haydn.

The connection between Beethoven and the Schlegels may be considered from two overlapping perspectives: the first is "literary" – through reading their work, or the work of those connected with them; the second is through personal contact with their close associates. The first important literary connection between Beethoven and the Schlegels was through Shakespeare. That Beethoven read Shakespeare is well documented; this alone connects the composer to certain devices of "dramatic" irony,<sup>1</sup> particularly the parabasis considered in the previous chapter. However, in a letter to Therese Malfatti in May 1810, Beethoven indicates that he had read Shakespeare in A.W. Schlegel and Tieck's translation.<sup>2</sup>

This direct literary connection is strengthened by the possibility that Beethoven also read A.W. Schlegel's *Lectures on Dramatic Art*, which he may have become acquainted through his close friend Karl Joseph Bernard, editor of the *Wiener Zeitung*. Bernard appears extensively throughout the conversation books, but in one entry (dating from late September 1824) he states that he possesses a copy of

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<sup>1</sup> Note that although such devices in Shakespeare have their origins in Greek tragedies there is no evidence that Beethoven knew these works. The connection to so-called "dramatic" or "Sophoclean" irony, whilst pertinent, is therefore perhaps more accurately made through Shakespeare than through the Classics.

<sup>2</sup> Anderson, Emily (1961) *The Letters of Beethoven*, Vol. 1 p. 273

Schlegel's *Lectures*.<sup>3</sup> This implies that, at the very least, Beethoven had access to this work only a few months before beginning the A minor quartet. Crucially, in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Lecture, Schlegel outlines his understanding of the ironic basis of art, specifically referring to Romantic irony in Shakespeare.<sup>4</sup>

The work of Goethe, one of Beethoven's favourite authors, provides a similar link between the composer and devices of literary irony. As Romain Roland considers "from his earliest days [Beethoven] had steeped his mind in Goethe's works. He worshipped him, he read Goethe every day".<sup>5</sup> Significantly Friedrich Schlegel considered Goethe's work, particularly *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, (a work that Beethoven specifically refers to in the letter to Malfatti of 1810) as ironic. The connection to Schlegel and Romantic irony through Goethe is, however, personal as well as literary. Goethe's letter to August Schlegel in June 1798 demonstrates not only that he knew the Schlegels personally, but also that he was familiar with their work:

Many thanks for the 'Athenaeum' you sent; I should have liked and enjoyed its contents even if the authors had not spoken of me and my work with such decided approval . . . We shall have a good deal of pleasant conversation over this in detail when we meet again or when I can find a peaceful hour to write more fully.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, two letters to Schiller in 1800 indicate that he also received proofs of the *Athenaeum* from Friedrich Schlegel.<sup>7</sup> Finally, a letter to his brother August von Goethe in 1808 demonstrates that he maintained an interest in the brothers:

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<sup>3</sup> "Ich habe ihm . . . Schlegels Vorlesungen über die Dramaturgie . . ." Köhler, Karl-Heinz and Herre, Grita (1972). *Ludwig van Beethovens Konversationshäfte*. Volume 6, p. 303

<sup>4</sup> It is also significant that many of the concepts of this lecture series are actually related to Friedrich Schlegel's work. Moreover, although August Wilhelm was the more popular speaker, Friedrich Schlegel was also known for his lecture series. Significantly, Leon Botstein states that many of Beethoven's friends, including Prince Lobkowitz and Georg Kinsky, actually attended a 15 lecture series on art and drama that Friedrich Schlegel gave in Vienna in 1808. (Botstein, Leon (1994) "The Patrons and Publics of the Quartets: Music, Culture, and Society in Beethoven's Vienna" in Winter, Robert and Martin, Robert (eds.) (1994) *The Beethoven Quartet Companion*, p. 102)

<sup>5</sup> Roland, Romain (1931) *Goethe and Beethoven*, trans. Pfister and Kemp (1968). p.4

<sup>6</sup> Herzfeld, M. von and Sym, C. Melvil (1957) *Letters from Goethe* number 301

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the second letter, in Dec. 1800, demonstrates, not only that he had received Friedrich as a guest, but that he was also reading works by August Wilhelm: "The enclosed charming little book [A.W. Schlegel's satire on Kotzebue] will no doubt already be current among you; if not, do keep it

We have already finished a good many things and started others and have also read Cicero's letters in Wieland's translation . . . and Friedrich Schlegel on the 'Language and Wisdom of the Indians'.<sup>8</sup>

The significance of this relationship is that Beethoven spent time with Goethe in Teplitz in 1812, after the correspondence quoted above.<sup>9</sup> This fact raises more questions than it answers: whilst Goethe was familiar with the Schlegel's work there is no record of his conversation with Beethoven, thus there is no evidence that they discussed it. In addition, Goethe and Beethoven appear to have had neither direct contact nor correspondence after their time together.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, the connection to the Schlegels through Goethe must at least be considered plausible.

The final literary connection between Beethoven and the philosophy of Romantic irony is provided by E.T.A. Hoffmann. Beethoven's sole letter to Hoffmann refers to his reviews, in particular his essay on Beethoven's chamber music.<sup>11</sup> However, as A. C. Kalischer notes in his commentary on this letter, Beethoven also read Hoffman's literary works, often praising them in the conversation books.<sup>12</sup> This alone may indicate another link to Romantic irony: Hoffman's work demonstrates a high level of ironic technique. More significant, however, is the fact that Beethoven had read Hoffmann's essay, which specifically refers to Beethoven as a "conscious" artist. This produces a direct connection between Beethoven and one of the fundamental concepts of Romantic irony, a connection arising, moreover, within the context of a discussion of the composer's own music.

The "personal" connections between Beethoven and the Schlegels complement these "literary" ones. The most important of these is established through the Brentano

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for a few days, it undeniably contains some brilliant passages . . . I have continued my solitary existence; I have been out walking once only, on the finest day. Friedrich Schlegel, Harbauer and Niethammer have been to see me". Ibid. number 334

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. number 383

<sup>9</sup> According to Roland's account, after their initial meeting, "they went out walking together. On the day after, the 21<sup>st</sup> [of July], Goethe went to see Beethoven, in the evening. He called again on Thursday, the 23<sup>rd</sup>, and Beethoven played to him at the piano." Roland (1931) p. 45

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 87-93

<sup>11</sup> Anderson, Emily (1961) *The Letters of Beethoven* p. 884

<sup>12</sup> Kalischer, A.C. and Schedlock, J. S. (1909) *The Letters of Ludwig van Beethoven* vol. II p. 170



family, particularly the poet Clemens Brentano. Brentano knew Friedrich Schlegel personally, particularly during his residence in Vienna in 1813; Barry Cooper specifically identifies him as a member of Friedrich Schlegel's circle.<sup>13</sup> Crucially, as Immerwahr considers, Brentano's work was directly influenced by Schlegel, particularly with regard to irony and narrative devices.<sup>14</sup> The contact between Beethoven and Brentano is therefore a significant one: it substantially increases the possibility of Beethoven's exposure to the philosophy of the Schlegels in the period prior to the composition of the works in question.

That Beethoven knew Brentano is certain, though when they first met is not clear. Theodore Albrecht indicates that Beethoven may have met the poet in Teplitz in 1811,<sup>15</sup> whilst Köhler and Herre go further, stating conclusively that Beethoven met both Goethe and Brentano at that time.<sup>16</sup> However, they were certainly acquainted during Brentano's year in Vienna from July 1813:<sup>17</sup> the first of two surviving letters from Brentano to Beethoven (from summer 1813) indicates that the two had met; the second, from January 1814 contains the text of four *Lieder*.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, a certain familiarity, beyond more than simply a formal acquaintance, is perhaps implied in the only reference to Brentano in Beethoven's conversation books where Bernard mentions him in first name only.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Cooper, Barry (2000) *Beethoven* p. 108

<sup>14</sup> "Godwi shows the influence both of Friedrich Schlegel's critical theory and of his practical example in *Lucinde*." Immerwahr (1988) p. 95

<sup>15</sup> Albrecht, Theodore (1996) *Letters to Beethoven* p. 20

<sup>16</sup> Köhler and Herre (1972) Vol. 1, p. 422 n. 87

<sup>17</sup> "Beethoven may have met poet Clemens Brentano . . . in Teplitz during the summer of 1811, although there is no contemporary evidence for such a meeting . . . Clemens Brentano spent the period from July 1813 to July 1814 in Vienna . . . Beethoven seems to have spent much of July in Vienna . . . and most of August and early September in Baden (with occasional trips to the city), moving back to Vienna between September 15 and 20". (Albrecht, Theodore (1996) p. 20). In addition, the fact that Brentano mentions that Beethoven was in Teplitz in a letter to Friedrich Karl von Savigny in October 1811 perhaps indicates that the two had met at that time (Oehring, Sabine (ed.) (1996) *Clemens Brentano: Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, vol. 32, number 598, p.358).

<sup>18</sup> Oehring, Sabine (ed.) (2000) *Clemens Brentano: Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, vol. 33 numbers 648 and 649, p. 107-112.

<sup>19</sup> This occurs between March and May 1819. Köhler and Herre (1972) vol. 1 p. 53

Moreover, the link between them is strengthened through Beethoven's relationships with Bettina von Arnim, Brentano's sister, and Antonie Brentano, his sister in law. Antonie first made Beethoven's acquaintance in 1809, and a close friendship developed over the next two years. They spent considerable periods of time together,<sup>20</sup> and even after Antonie left Vienna permanently in 1812 they continued a close and intimate correspondence. Indeed, this relationship was so strong that, as Maynard Solomon considers, Antonie is the most likely possibility for Beethoven's famous "Immortal Beloved".<sup>21</sup>

Although Solomon considers the relationship between Beethoven and Bettina Brentano only a "flirtation",<sup>22</sup> Roland's account suggests a more intense relationship. Bettina was "fascinated from the first moment, and remained so to the end – *Ich habe diesen Mann unendlich lieb gewonnen*" ("I have become infinitely fond of this man")...she devoted herself to his cause".<sup>23</sup> Beethoven, in return, sought her company assiduously: he "would not let Bettina go, accompanied her to the Brentanos' house, took her for walks...During his last days in Vienna he never left her . . . and when he had to go he begged her to write to him at least once a month, because he had no other friend".<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, Roland notes that their conversations during their time in Vienna "were on serious matters".<sup>25</sup> Whatever the nature of the relationship it is possible to speculate that these conversations mentioned Romanticism: significantly, Bettina knew not only Tieck, whose works became almost synonymous with Romantic irony, she also knew intimately both Brentano and Goethe (indeed it was through

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<sup>20</sup> Beethoven, for example spent the summer of 1812 with the Brentanos in Karlsbad and Franzensbad.

<sup>21</sup> Solomon, Maynard (1978) *Beethoven* p. 241-250. In addition, Cooper concurs with Solomon, adding that, at the very least Antonie Brentano was "intensely fond of Beethoven" (Cooper (2000) p. 211)

<sup>22</sup> Solomon (1978) p. 222

<sup>23</sup> Roland (1931) p. 13

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. pp 12-14. Although, as Cooper suggests, Bettina's account of their relationship, from which much of Roland's evidence is drawn is unreliable, it is certain that she had, at least, "a genuine fondness and admiration for him and his music" (Cooper (2000) p. 194).

<sup>25</sup> Roland (1931) p. 12

Bettina that Goethe and Beethoven met).<sup>26</sup> All three of these were connected to Schlegel.

Beethoven's relationship to Bettina, together with those with the other members of the Brentano family, thus provide significant links to central figures of the emerging German Romanticism, and to Schlegel in particular. The influence of both Schlegel and Goethe upon this family was considerable; thus it is possible to assume that Beethoven came into contact with this influence through his close, even intimate relationships with them.

Finally, two additional "personal" connections can be made between Beethoven and Schlegel. The first of these is through Bernard, who mentions both Schlegels several times throughout the conversation books.<sup>27</sup> These entries demonstrate that Beethoven at least knew enough of Friedrich Schlegel to be able to discuss his conversion to Catholicism, and imply a certain level of familiarity with his movements, as well, perhaps, as his ideas. The second connection is through the composer Johann Friedrich Reichardt: from 1796 Reichardt's country estate in Giebichenstein was "a 'hostel of Romanticism' for such artists and intellectuals as Goethe . . . [Achim] von Arnim, Brentano, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Tieck, the brothers Grimm, Fichte, Jean Paul, Schleiermacher, Novalis, Schlegel and J.H. Voss".<sup>28</sup> Significantly, according to Cooper, Reichardt became acquainted with Beethoven in 1808,<sup>29</sup> although it seems that the relationship was problematic: in April 1809 Beethoven wrote "I have very good reasons in general to distrust the character of H[err] R[eichardt]".<sup>30</sup> Beethoven's relationships, though, were often tempestuous, and

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<sup>26</sup> Helps, Arthur and Howard, Elizabeth Jane (1957) *Bettina: A Portrait*.

<sup>27</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, for example, is mentioned in Köhler and Herre (1972) vol. I pp. 169, 200, 352 and vol. II p. 348, whilst August Wilhelm is mentioned in vol. VI p. 363.

<sup>28</sup> Helm, Eugene and Hartung, Günter (2001) "Reichardt, Johann Friedrich: Life" in Stanley Sadie ed. (2001) *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* vol. 21 p. 138

<sup>29</sup> "Another visitor . . . was the composer Johann Friedrich Reichardt, who arrived from Kassel on 24 November and remained for a few months. . . Beethoven invited Reichardt to dinner at the home of Countess Erdödy. . . five days later Reichardt was invited back, this time to hear the first of Beethoven's new piano trios. Then on 31 December he heard both trios, again at the same venue." Cooper (2000) p. 178

<sup>30</sup> Anderson (1961) vol. 1, p. 225. In addition, in December of the same year Beethoven refers to Reichardt's *Vertraute Briefe* as a "silly scrawl". Ibid. p. 250

it entirely possible that he later revised his opinion of Reichardt. Regardless of this, Beethoven's acquaintance with Reichardt produces a plausible connection not only to the Schlegel's, but also to many leading figures of early German Romanticism.

These last "personal" contacts complement the connections between Beethoven, the Schlegels and the concept of Romantic irony outlined above. Whilst no single element provides a definitive link, their cumulative effect demonstrates a plausible relationship between the composer and the Early German Romantics. As Daverio states, "a romantic worldview was very much in the air in Beethoven's household".<sup>31</sup> In particular, between 1808 and 1814, Beethoven came into close contact with people either directly involved with, or closely connected to the leading literary and philosophical figures of German Romanticism, including, most importantly, the Schlegels. If these relationships are combined with the discussion of Schlegel in the conversation books and Beethoven's possible re-acquaintance with the concept of Romantic irony just prior to the composition of the Op. 132 quartet through A.W. Schlegel's *Lectures*, then a basis for considering the late quartets in terms of Romantic irony may be suggested.

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Whilst the preceding discussion has suggested the direct influence of Schlegel's philosophy upon Beethoven's late works it is important to recognise that certain aspects of irony would also have been familiar to Beethoven from the work of his predecessors. In particular the dramatic irony of Mozart's operas and the elements of satire and parody in Haydn's music form important precedents for the irony that will be analysed in the next chapter.

However, the works of these composers also contain important instances of related phenomena, particularly wit and humour. These, together with irony, have been variously applied to descriptions both of music in general as well as to specific

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<sup>31</sup> Daverio (2000) p. 152

composers.<sup>32</sup> Since all three concepts deal primarily with incongruity and contrast, however, the distinction between them is not always plain: there are clear relationships between them, and indeed even apparent overlap in places. This situation is further compounded by the radical re-evaluation of irony undertaken by the Romantics, particularly Schlegel. This new conception, indeed new *meaning* of irony changed the understanding of the phenomenon, significantly affecting the aesthetics, philosophy and art of the following years. The discussion around this new conception of irony, however, was rarely definite in its use of terminology, often bordering on other concepts. There are, however, important differences between irony, wit and humour, key areas of each that are distinct from the others. Even in the writing of the Romantics, where these three phenomena were drawn closest together, they remained, to some extent, distinct. Therefore, to simply consider them as comparable or synonymous is to create an equivalence that the Romantics did not intend.

The following section will consider the complex interaction and relationship between irony, wit and humour, particularly within the context of early German Romanticism. Crucially, the differences in the conceptual bases of these concepts will be seen to correspond with their manifestation within actual discourses. Specifically, although the irony of Beethoven's late quartets is certainly related to the humour, wit and earlier forms of irony in the works of composers such as Haydn and Mozart (and indeed within his own earlier works), it is, nevertheless, distinct. Considering the relationships between these concepts will demonstrate the unique nature of the irony that will be seen in the late quartets.

The distinction between Romantic irony, wit and humour will be approached from two key viewpoints. The first relates to the conception of "proto-Romantic irony" outlined by Muecke: earlier instances of irony – those that most closely overlap with

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<sup>32</sup> The list of commentators/works that consider the relationships between these phenomenon and both individual composers is extensive. A rough sampling might include Richter, Jean Paul (1804) *Vorlesungen über Aesthetik*, Rosen, Charles (1971) *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven*, Wheelock, Gretchen A. (1992) *Haydn's Ingenious Jestings with Art: Contexts of Musical Wit and Humour*, Bonds (1991) and Chua, Daniel (1999) *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* chapters 25 and 26. All of these works will be referred to in the following discussion.



humour – consist only of certain *elements* of Schlegel’s Romantic irony; they do not accord with the most important aspects – Fichtean reflection and paradox. This first difference really generates the second. That is, that where Romantic irony is a continuous, infinite reflective process, the irony in these earlier instances is, in Wayne Booth’s terms, “finite”, “stable” and “reconstructable”.

These differences distinguish the Romantic irony of Beethoven’s late works from the instances of wit, humour and “rhetorical” irony in earlier musical works. Although some of Haydn’s work, for example, may best be located in the “overlapping” of humour and Romantic irony it cannot be considered to correspond to Romantic irony, at least in the full, rich sense that Schlegel’s conception involves. Indeed, as will be seen, there are few instances of musical irony that do correspond to this full conception of Romantic irony. Crucially, however, I will assert that such a correspondence does occur in certain of Beethoven’s late quartets.

## Wit and Humour

Wit and humour are categories that occur frequently together, both in comparison and in contrast. Whereas humour is almost always considered as a fundamental *property* of both artworks and artists themselves, wit has a more limited, specific meaning.<sup>33</sup> Firstly, wit is a combinatory power that makes associations and demonstrates an essential affinity between elements that are contrasting and even contradictory; Locke defines wit as “the assemblage of ideas, and putting those together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity”.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Note that the German term “Witz” may be directly translated to the contemporaneous usage of the English “Wit”. The close, almost parallel relationship of German theories of literature and comedy to those of the English in the eighteenth century means that there is an almost identical understanding of the basis and elements of wit. It is this conception of wit that the German Romantics inherited and indeed built upon. In any case, “wit” has a different meaning from the manner in which it is now used. In particular, whereas “wit” is now frequently used to imply that something or someone is comical or funny, the earlier usages examined here encompassed a far greater range of meaning.

<sup>34</sup> Locke, John (1690) *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* p. 86. Locke’s definition distinguishes wit from *judgement*, which “lies quite on the other side, in separating carefully, one from another, ideas wherein can be found the least difference, thereby to avoid being misled by similitude, and by affinity to take one thing for another” (ibid.).

Above all, this combinatory power – the perception of similarities and relationships between apparently dissimilar elements – is a faculty of the intellect, a display of intellectual virtuosity.<sup>35</sup> Sulzer, for example, describes wit as “a particular gift of the mind which consists principally in the facility for quickly seeing and vividly feeling the various connections and relationships of one subject compared with another”.<sup>36</sup> However, this association with intellectual facility led to an inherent association with artifice: instances of wit require intellectual “shaping” in order to function. As such, they possess an obvious “made” quality, similar to that of an artistic creation.<sup>37</sup>

The frequent descriptions of “flashes of wit”<sup>38</sup> – “hasty, dazzling, glancing fancies”<sup>39</sup> – highlight the limited scope of wit. Its restricted locus of specific, immediate instances, together with the rapidity with which it operates frequently gives rise to descriptions of wit as “dazzling”.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the striking, novel combination of disparate elements and sudden discovery of relationship between them produces frequent associations with the element of surprise and laughter.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Dugald Stewart, for example, considers that “We consider wit as a sort of feat or trick of intellectual dexterity, analogous, in some respects, to the extraordinary performances of jugglers and rope-dancers”. Stewart, Dugald (1792) *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* p. 273

<sup>36</sup> Sulzer (1771-1774) *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, 2 vols. Translated Wheelock (1992) p. 28

<sup>37</sup> This “artistic” quality is seen in Corbyn Morris’ definition of wit as “a Stroke of Art, where the original Subject, being insufficient in itself, is garnished and deck’d with auxiliary Objects” (Morris, Corbyn (1744) *An Essay Towards Fixing the True Standards of Wit, Humour Raillery, Satire and Ridicule* p. 23), and persists in William Hazlitt’s later statement that “Wit is the product of art and fancy” (Hazlitt, William (1818) *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* p. 15).

<sup>38</sup> Stewart (1792) p. 274

<sup>39</sup> Wheelock (1992) p. 21. Also, see again Sulzer’s reference to “quickly seeing and vividly feeling” and Morris’ brief “stroke of art” quoted above.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Dugald Stewart, for example, wrote “there is unquestionably a *smile* appropriated to the flashes of wit; – a smile of surprise and wonder; – not altogether unlike the effect produced on the mind and the countenance, by a feat of *legerdemain*.” (Stewart (1792) p. 274) The relationship of “surprise” to wit, however, is somewhat contentious. It is present almost constantly in definitions of wit throughout the Eighteenth century: see, for example, Richard Blackmore (1716) *Essay upon Wit*, p. 191/193, Morris (1744) p. 2, and Stewart (1792) p. 272. (Similarly, Adam Smith’s discussion of the effect of surprise displays much in common with discussion of wit: “When one accustomed object appears after another, which it does not usually follow, it first excites, by its unexpectedness, the sentiment called surprise, and afterwards, by the singularity of the succession, or order of its appearance, the sentiment properly called wonder” (Smith, Adam (1795) *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, p. 40)). Indeed, this relationship persisted even into the Nineteenth century; as will be seen, the effect of surprise is found in Friedrich Schlegel’s conception of wit, occurring not only in some of his fragments, but more particularly in those of his brother. However, Jean Paul argues, persuasively, that although surprise

Although the combinatory power of wit covers a wide scope of instances,<sup>42</sup> there is a significant association with rhetorical figures such as metaphor and simile. For example, Gretchen Wheelock considers that the aim of “true wit” “was to engage the imagination without violating good sense. Delight in discovering an uncommonly apt allusion or metaphor, the originality of which was as remarkable as its truth, was consonant with that aim”.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, as will be seen, Jean Paul’s conception of wit focuses almost exclusively upon metaphor, simile and allegory; in his work metaphor is almost *the* exemplar of wit.

This association highlights wit’s combinative power as its most fundamental element. In such instances the initial contradiction or incongruity is resolved in a moment of enlightenment in which the essential connection is perceived. As such wit produces only an *apparent* antithesis: the contradictions of wit only appear to be antitheses until they resolve.<sup>44</sup> As will be considered, this underlines the important difference between the combinative power of wit – the ability to produce metaphorical associations – and the infinite paradox of irony.

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Humour is best understood as an all-pervading aspect of the nature of both the artist and his works.<sup>45</sup> Sulzer describes it as

a frame of mind in which a vague agreeable or disagreeable feeling is so pervasive that all perceptions and utterances are affected by it. It is a passionate state in which the passion is not violent and has no definite object, but simply spreads pleasure or

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does occur in relation to wit it cannot be a fundamental property of it: “Does wit reread lose its value along with its surprise?” Richter, Jean Paul (1804) *Vorlesungen über Aesthetik* in Wheeler, Kathleen M (1984) *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: the Romantic Ironists and Goethe* p. 187

<sup>42</sup> As Wheelock notes, “the specifically literary meanings attached to wit range from ingenious and novel enhancement of language to the incongruous juxtaposition of “things by nature most unneighborly”.” Wheelock (1992) p. 22

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p. 23

<sup>44</sup> Indeed, Schlegel considers that “The form of wit is the appearance of absolute antithesis”. Schlegel (1957) no. 540 p. 67

<sup>45</sup> Like “wit” and “witz”, the German “Laune” was used roughly equivalently to the English “humour”.

displeasure over the entire spirit . . . Often the artist has no other muse than his humour to support him.<sup>46</sup>

Humour is thus related to temperament, forming the ground state of an individual's nature, the paradigm through which all experience was filtered and from which every utterance was ultimately derived.<sup>47</sup> This emphasis upon the nature of the individual meant that, from its beginning, humour was a "natural" quality, a fundamental property of the artist's nature. However, the artist's humour also formed the basic temperament of his works, 'infusing' the spirit of the artwork with that of its creator. As Wheelock notes, the unique humour of the artist "betrayed itself in the natural, in the personal style congruent with the artist's unique temperament".<sup>48</sup>

Ordinarily, humour was to be tempered by reason, by the "sensible" behaviour of society. Increasingly, however, the humorist was seen as one who, because of the abundance of his humour, wilfully departed socially accepted conventions – both artistic and behavioural – in favour of striking, even eccentric behaviour, novel associations and flights of fancy, frequently grotesque in nature. Such indulgence of the passions and artistic fancy led almost invariably to an association with laughter and the comic. At first, this association was with "low", "vulgar" laughter, but over time it came to include the artistic representation of the "foibles" and eccentricities of individuals, presenting them in a good-natured rather than satiric light.<sup>49</sup> In other words it was considered humorous to portray the unique "humour" i.e. temperament of individuals.<sup>50</sup> Thus, for example, Sterne's contemporaries consistently identified

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<sup>46</sup> Sulzer (1771-1774) translated Wheelock (1992) p. 29

<sup>47</sup> Indeed the fundamental temperament from which each person's character was determined was actually considered to relate to one of four basic "humours".

<sup>48</sup> Wheelock (1992) p. 28

<sup>49</sup> It is at this point that the distinction between humour and wit was seen most clearly; wit, in contrast to humour, was always considered more refined, largely because of the intellectual demands that it required both of the author and the recipients.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Hazlitt's comment that "Humour . . . is an imitation of the natural or acquired absurdities of mankind, or of the ludicrous in accident, situation and character" (Hazlitt (1818) p. 15). In addition, Stuart Tave demonstrates that "By the middle of the nineteenth century, it was a commonplace that the best comic works present amiable originals, often models of good nature, whose little peculiarities are not satirically instructive, but objects of delight and love". (Tave, Stuart M. (1960) *The Amiable Humorist: A Study in the Comic Theory and Criticism of the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*, p. viii.)



his portrayal of Uncle Toby's "foibles" or Tristram's many eccentricities in *Tristram Shandy* as humorous.<sup>51</sup>

The emphasis upon striking associations, originality and the "natural" quality of humour, became increasingly associated with the conception of the natural genius.<sup>52</sup> Increasingly, it became *because* of his inherent genius that the humorist was able to break with artistic and social conventions to make his extraordinary, striking new forms. Through this association the conception of humour included forms of high comedy, like those of Shakespeare, that border on tragedy.

Finally, the consistent association between humour and wit should be noted; wit is understood as resulting from the intellectual, artistic faculty of the humorist, i.e. as a further manifestation of his nature. Indeed the combination of humour and wit was considered desirable. In Morris' definition, for example, humour is considered the ground-state of a work, forming its basic character and subject, whilst wit is an "ornamental" device that decorates or colours the subject of a work with dazzling flashes of striking and novel combinations:

The most agreeable representations or compositions of all others appear not where they separately exist, but where they are united together in the same fabric; where humour is the ground-work and chief substance, and wit happily spread, quickens the whole with embellishments.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> For an indication of such comparisons see Bonds (1991) p. 57-63. It is important to note, however, that although Sterne's work does fit into the category of the good-natured presentation of individuals there is also a strong element of satirical corrective in his work: it is not simply the actions of Toby or Tristram that are presented; rather, these characters represent 'types' – their oddities are those of humanity. In Sterne's work there is therefore a mix of humour, comedy, satire and irony, and it is this that led to the variety of aesthetic theories that drew upon Sterne as a model. Crucially however, different authors focussed on different elements of Sterne's work in developing their theories: where Schlegel found irony in Sterne's attitude to his characters, in the continual process of negation (Schlegel's alternation of self-creation and self-destruction) and in the self-reflexivity of the work, Jean Paul emphasised the comic techniques and overarching "authorial" viewpoint as humorous. To equate irony and humour because both may be found in Sterne is to disregard the important distinctions between these conceptions.

<sup>52</sup> Indeed, for some writers the terms 'genius' and 'humorist' were effectively interchangeable. See Wheelock (1992) p. 27

<sup>53</sup> Morris (1744) p. 25. It is important to note, however, that the "natural" quality of humour – its basis as an intrinsic element of the individual's human nature – contrasts with wit's "artificial" nature, with its relationship to the artist's intellect and fancy. Thus where humour is "generous benevolent sentiments of heart" (ibid. p. 24) wit's intellectual basis is cold or inanimate: "in the Allusions of Wit, Severity, Bitterness and Satire are frequently exhibited" (ibid.).



## Romantic Wit and Humour

The Romantic conception of both wit and humour essentially follows the established critical definitions examined above. For example, although Jean Paul expands the definitions of both he does not *redefine* the phenomena in the manner that Schlegel did for irony. His description of humour is the most oft quoted of his definitions:

Humour as the *inverted sublime* annihilates not the individual but the finite through its contrast with the real. It recognises no individual foolishness, no fools, but only folly and a mad world.<sup>54</sup>

His inversion of the concept of the sublime as “an applied infinity”<sup>55</sup> (where the properties of infinity are attributed to finite objects) applies finitude to the infinite, thereby producing the “infinite contrast” between finitude and infinity themselves that he considers defines the comic.<sup>56</sup> Humour compares or contrasts the infinite to the finite; it “measures out the small world . . . against the infinite world and sees them together”, producing, “a kind of laughter . . . which contains pain and greatness”.<sup>57</sup> In particular, individuals become microcosms of totality, their unique foibles become projected onto an infinite plain – it is not individuals that are foolish, but rather *all* people. Humour is therefore inherently metaphorical: it is to be found in the comparison of small and great, finite and infinite that levels *both*, and laughter at the small or the part also entails mocking of the great or the whole.<sup>58</sup> Thus the

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<sup>54</sup> Wheeler (1984) p. 174, emphasis added. This definition clarifies Jean Paul’s earlier description of humour as the “romantic-comic”, an “infinity of contrast, that is a negative infinity” (ibid.). Note that Jean Paul’s formulation “negative infinity” comes very close to Hegel and Kierkegaard’s nomination of irony as “infinite absolute negativity”. Again, this has led to the two phenomena being confused. However, where Hegel envisioned irony as the infinite negation of every positive assertion, Jean Paul’s “infinite” refers to a continual contrast between finite objects, and it is this contrast that is described as humour.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. p. 174

<sup>56</sup> “How will the comic become romantic, since it consists merely in contrasting the finite with the finite and cannot allow any infinity?” Ibid. p. 174

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. p. 177. Note that it is this “measuring out of the small against the great” that is the inverse of the sublime.

<sup>58</sup> “Humorous totality takes many forms . . . It will be expressed in any generalisation from something which is strictly true only in a particular case; for example, in Sterne, “Learned men, brother Toby, don’t write dialogues upon long noses for nothing”” (ibid. p. 176.)

examples that he gives are essentially contrasts of the particular and general, which represent finite and infinite respectively.<sup>59</sup>

In Jean Paul's writing the concept of humour comes closest to Schlegel's irony. For example, the allegorical associations and equations of the finite and infinite in his humour indicate a fundamental, over-arching world-view similar to that encountered in Romantic irony. The humorist "simply laughs at everything, without excluding . . . himself";<sup>60</sup> to him everything is ridiculous, everything is levelled and equal. This affinity is also seen in the "overlap" of concepts such as self-reflexivity, the breaking of illusion and the confusion of discursive "levels", which Jean Paul considers as elements of humour:

For every humorist the self plays the first role; when he can, he even introduces his personal circumstances upon the comic stage, although he does so only to annihilate it poetically.<sup>61</sup>

Humour often delights even in contradictions and impossibilities, for example in Tieck's *Zerbino*, in which the *dramatis personae* finally believe themselves to be merely fictive non-entities, thus drawing the audience themselves onto the stage and the stage under the press jack.<sup>62</sup>

These concepts, however, also function as precedents of Romantic irony. Indeed, it is largely as a result of this "overlap" that Jean Paul's humour is sometimes considered synonymous with Schlegel's irony. This misapprehension, however, arises largely from the common misunderstanding of Schlegel's irony – associating and limiting it to devices of illusion-breaking. In Schlegel's conception such devices produce continual parabasis – the authorial presence within the work – and contribute to the paradox, the continual alternation of self-creation and destruction

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<sup>59</sup> He considers that Cervantes, for example, draws "humorous" parallels between "realism and idealism, between body and soul, in the face of the infinite equation; and his twin stars of folly hover over the entire human race" (Ibid. p. 175). In addition to Cervantes, Jean Paul cites Shakespeare and Sterne as examples of this conception of humour: the "mad mask" of Hamlet, for example is a disguise behind which Shakespeare ridicules the world (ibid. p. 175), while in Sterne "Uncle Toby's campaigns do not make Toby himself or Louis XIV alone ridiculous; they are an allegory of all human hobbyhorses" (ibid. p. 175). (Swift, Voltaire, Rabelais and Tieck are also considered as humorists, without examples being given.)

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. p. 176

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. p. 179

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. p. 178

that is so vital to his Fichtean model. Jean Paul, in contrast, focuses on the comic effect of these devices; they are necessary techniques for “Romantic-comic” humour.

Thus, although both irony and humour have been related to such devices the emphasis is different, and this difference reflects those between the fundamental bases of these conceptions, differences that preclude synonymy. Schlegel’s irony is based in Fichtean reflection, a continual, infinite process of assertion and negation, of infinite reflection in a mirror. Jean Paul’s humour is not an infinite process; rather, it is, at all times, simply the contrast between the finite, particular and individual and the infinite and general. Jean Paul irreversibly connects his humour to the “romantic comic”;<sup>63</sup> the comic both delimits and defines humour.<sup>64</sup> This relationship clearly differentiates it from Schlegel’s irony: irony is not inherently bound to the comic; rather it encompasses but also transcends it.

Indeed, it is on precisely this point that Ernst Behler differentiates Jean Paul’s humour from Schlegel’s irony. He observes the “overlapping” of aspects of the two conceptions considered above but concludes, however, that “in the last analysis, Jean Paul conceives of humoristic contrasting in such broad terms that his concept of “world humour” eludes critical distinctions and appears as the manifestation of the comic mood as such, or more precisely as Jean Paul’s own manner of comic contrasts”.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> This basis in the comic means that humour invariably produces “a kind of laughter” (ibid. p. 177), and humorists are known as “comic poets” (ibid.). Thus “the humorist is both his own court jester or quartet of masked Italian comedians and at the same time their prince and director” (ibid.).

<sup>64</sup> Jean Paul writes, “Since without sensuousness the comic cannot exist, the material element as the exponent of applied finitude in humour, can never become too colourful. The representation should overflow with images and with witty and imaginative contrasts, both in grouping and in colouring” (ibid. p. 183). The conclusion of the section on humour is therefore essentially a list of comic devices that enhance the humour of a work by adding such colour and sensuousness. These include “always to choose active verbs of motion . . . always to give definite quantities in allusions to money, numbers and all magnitudes, where one expects the indefinite” (ibid. p. 184). Moreover, “the comic writer should also take advantage of proper names and technical terms (ibid.), and “presentation of movement, particularly quick motion, or of rest beside movement, helps heighten the comic effect of humorous sensuousness. Presentation of a mass has a similar effect” (ibid. p. 185). This section therefore clearly displays the essential link that Jean Paul perceived between humour and the comic. Moreover, it gives some indication of the difference between humour and irony: these comic devices are not ironic, nor would they contribute to the continual alternation of creation and destruction involved in romantic irony.

<sup>65</sup> Behler, Ernst (1988) “The Theory of Irony in German Romanticism” in Frederick Garber (ed.)

Moreover, Jean Paul himself explicitly differentiates humour from irony. Although some of his comments on irony relate only to “rhetorical” forms, many of his observations actually reflect Schlegel’s conception.<sup>66</sup> For example, he considers Goethe’s irony as (to paraphrase Schlegel) “not simply circumscribed in moments, but rather pervading entire works”.<sup>67</sup> More importantly, he refers to an ironic manner – objective and serious, even “cold” and “calm”, and lacking subjective reaction – similar to the constant negativity of Socratic irony.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, he specifically refers to the ironic perception of Plato’s Socrates, which he explicitly differentiates from humour:

Plato’s irony . . . could be called world-irony, on an analogy with world humour; it hovers singing and sporting not only above errors but above all knowledge (just as humour is more concerned with follies) like a flame – free, consuming and rejoicing, volatile and yet pressing towards heaven alone.<sup>69</sup>

Overall, Jean Paul’s irony is a detached manner, unengaged and objective, manifesting itself in the “cold” language of rhetorical irony and the urbanity of Socrates (the objective viewpoint that rises over everything, engaging with nothing earnestly that forms the basis of Schlegel’s conception). Crucially, throughout his

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*Romantic Irony* p. 68. Indeed, Behler also outlines a contemporaneous opposition of irony to humour on the basis of their effect: “irony was faulted with being too intellectual, sophistically Erasmic, deceiving, haughty, dandyish and coldly Western, whereas humour was seen as genuine, open, honest and heartfelt” (ibid. p. 45)

<sup>66</sup> Indeed, the first examples that Jean Paul gives are simple verbal irony, demonstrating how they achieve their end – which is essentially “saying one thing and meaning another” – through linguistic means. See, for example, Hale (1973) p. 107/108. The equation of humour with irony considered above results in part from the misapprehension that his comments on irony relate only to such “rhetorical” forms.

<sup>67</sup> “That much the more elective affinity does irony have with Goethe’s epic prose. May the author of *Faust*, with his extraordinary powers for a characteristic humour and for an ironically cold story of folly, imitate Shakespeare, winged man on the dramatic Pegasus” ibid. p. 109/110. In addition, see pages 111/112 where examples of entire works, even entire author’s outputs are given as “ironic”.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. p. 107

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. p. 113. It is important to note that Jean Paul terms Socratic irony “world irony”, as an *analogy* to “world humour”. Analogy, however, is not the same as identity, thus Socratic irony – which forms a basis for Schlegel’s Romantic irony – is not the same as humour. Indeed, Jean Paul gives one explicit difference: where Socratic irony views everything from an objective, ironic light, hovering freely above them all (cf. Schlegel’s “the freeist of all licences”), humour views only the *faults* of mankind from above, comparing the finite to the infinite in order to laugh at the world through the folly of the individual.



discussion he continually distinguishes such irony from humour, and ironists are differentiated from humorists.<sup>70</sup>

Although Schlegel rarely mentions humour, his brief references reflect this distinction. *Athenaeum* fragment 305 is perhaps the most significant:

Humour deals with being and non-being, and its true essence is reflection. Hence its closeness to the elegy and to everything transcendental; and hence its arrogance and its bent for the mysticism of wit. Just as genius is necessary to naïveté, so too an earnest, pure beauty is a requisite of humour. Most of all humour likes to hover about the gently and clearly flowing rhapsodies of philosophy or poetry, and abhors cumbersome masses and disconnected parts.<sup>71</sup>

Although the emphasis on “being and non-being” and “reflection”, and the relationship to “everything transcendental” in this fragment correlate to Jean Paul’s conception of humour, Schlegel’s assertion that humour “abhors cumbersome masses and disconnected parts” is almost directly opposed to the manner in which Jean Paul’s humour may be seen in artworks. A similar opposition occurs in the manner in which Schlegel explicitly relates humour to beauty, rather than to the sublime. Finally, Schlegel actually mentions irony at the beginning of this fragment:

Intention taken to the point of irony and accompanied by the arbitrary illusion of its self-destruction is quite as naïve as instinct taken to the point of irony . . . <sup>72</sup>

Although the relationships between irony, humour and wit are not subsequently examined, it is significant that Schlegel explicitly differentiates between the three. As will be seen below, whilst irony is related to these other concepts, it retains its singular place in Schlegel’s thought.

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<sup>70</sup> Jean Paul’s discussion is littered with small comparisons and differentiations between irony, humour and other categories. For example, “Humour does not elevate individual imbecility but lowers the great . . . Humour raises the small like irony, but then sets the great beside the small” (Wheeler (1984) p. 174), or “What irony is to persiflage, humour is to whimsy. Humour has the higher, whimsy the lower point of comparison” (Hale (1973) p. 117). Moreover, he seems to equate “epic poets” with “ironists” and “comic poets” with “humorists”. Thus, “so many great and small comic epic poets – Cervantes, Swift, Ariosto, Voltaire, Steele, La Fontaine, Fielding – were unable to write comedies or wrote bad ones; and conversely, writers of great comedies can be cited as poor ironists” (ibid. p. 113). Such differentiations, again, occur throughout his discussion – see Hale (1973) pp. 113-115.

<sup>71</sup> Schlegel (1991) *Athenaeum* fragment 305 p. 60/61

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.



As with humour, the conventional definitions of wit inform the Romantic conceptions. Jean Paul's systematic discussion, for example, encompasses the conventional characteristics seen above: humour forms the inherent character of the work, with wit limited to particular instances or moments within works.<sup>73</sup> Wit, he argues, is most effective when brief because it is not simply the juxtaposition of elements that achieves its effect, but rather the "rapidity of the language".<sup>74</sup> In other words wit requires the quasi-artistic 'shaping' considered earlier to function effectively, condensing its oppositions into tighter juxtaposition.

Above all Jean Paul maintains the conventional definition of wit as a combinatory power.<sup>75</sup> In its "broadest sense" wit is the "comparison of two ideas, whether their objects be perceptions, ideas or a mixture of the two",<sup>76</sup> whilst the aesthetic form of wit (which he considers quintessential) "discovers . . . similarities between *incommensurable* magnitudes, between physical and spiritual worlds (e.g., sun and truth), in other words, the equation of self and other, of two perceptions".<sup>77</sup>

Crucially, his examples display the relationship between wit's combinatory power and that of metaphor and simile seen above: his examples of both "figurative" (i.e. poetic) and "non-figurative" aesthetic wit are metaphorical conjoinings such as "rage is a storm wind".<sup>78</sup> Indeed, Jean Paul's entire discussion of wit centres around such

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<sup>73</sup> See, for example, Wheeler (1984) p. 189-191

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. p. 188

<sup>75</sup> With some modification: he takes issue with the notion of wit as an ability to find "remote similarities" (Ibid. p. 185), since "remote" implies vague or weak. Jean Paul argues that all similarities are actually equalities, and therefore a binary state, rather than an incremental one. Moreover, he adds that wit, in the form of acumen, also involves finding *dissimilarities*, thus "similarities" is suspect. Wit is therefore more to do with establishing new relationships between elements.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. p. 186. He adds that this comparison produces a third idea that is solely the product of the creative mind.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. p. 187 emphasis original

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. p. 195. Other examples of such metaphorical, combinatory wit include "I sharpen ear and quill", "His Majesty has made both verses and war upon the world" (ibid.), and a paraphrase of Samuel Butler's comparison between a "reddening dawn" and "a red cooked lobster" (ibid. p. 187).

metaphors, including extended forms such as allegory: the intellectual faculty of aesthetic wit is even clearly described as the mental ability to create metaphor.<sup>79</sup>

Finally, it is important to note that Jean Paul explicitly differentiates wit from irony

The [comic] contrasts of wit endanger the appearance of gravity [the necessary condition of irony], because they express the serious too weakly and the ridiculous too strongly . . . cold gravity heightens the bitterness of irony spontaneously, without any desire, hatred or assistance on the part of the writer; Swift's irony is the most bitter only because it is the most serious.<sup>80</sup>

Schlegel's conception of wit demonstrates the same basis in conventional definitions. His aversion for philosophical "systems" and preference for ambiguity and uncertainty, however, means that his conception of wit is spread throughout his fragments. Moreover, as Muecke states, his terminology is frequently "shifting and unsettled";<sup>81</sup> at times concepts like 'Witz', 'Arabeske' and 'Ironie' appear to overlap. However, "sometimes 'Witz' and 'Arabeske' have other significances and are distinguished from, even contrasted with 'Ironie'".<sup>82</sup> His use of the term "wit" is particularly wide ranging: it is compared or attributed, for example, to the grotesque,<sup>83</sup> to mysticism,<sup>84</sup> to "urbanity"<sup>85</sup> and to algebra.<sup>86</sup> His descriptions of wit are equally diverse: wit is "absolute social feeling"<sup>87</sup> and "fragmentary genius";<sup>88</sup> its 'types' include "sorry wit",<sup>89</sup> "passive wit",<sup>90</sup> "solid wit",<sup>91</sup> "scientific

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Indeed, in some instances Jean Paul seems to use the terms "wit" and "metaphor" interchangeably: see Wheeler (1984) p 194-196.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. p. 194

<sup>80</sup> Hale (1973) p. 109/110. This differentiation is subsequently expanded in the rest of the passage. It is also important to note that Jean Paul knew Schlegel personally during the time of writing his *Aesthetics* (after publication of the *Athenaeum*), and indeed quotes him in places. Crucially, however, he does not consider wit or humour in terms of Schlegel's irony. I would suggest that this may be taken as evidence that Jean Paul at least considered that there are distinctions between the phenomena.

<sup>81</sup> Muecke (1969) p. 182

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Schlegel (1991) *Ideas* fragment 59 p. 99

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. *Ideas* fragments 26 and 59 p. 96 and 99

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. *Athenaeum* fragment 438 p. 91

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. *Athenaeum* fragment 445 p. 92

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. *Critical (Lyceum)* fragment 9 p. 2

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. *Critical (Lyceum)* fragment 17 p. 2

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. *Critical (Lyceum)* fragment 39 p. 5

wit”<sup>92</sup> and “architectonic wit”.<sup>93</sup> As a result, his precise meaning is frequently unclear, as are the relationships that he understood between irony, wit and humour. It is therefore important to understand both the similarities as well as the obvious distinctions that he makes.

Schlegel maintains the conventional definition of wit is combinatory in effect – in some cases he refers specifically to “combinative wit”;<sup>94</sup> indeed, in designating wit as “chemical” in nature he highlights its combinative power and ability to associate disparate elements.<sup>95</sup> Significantly, the combinative power of the novel – its mixture of styles and elements, its juxtapositions and production of new relationships between disparate elements – is likened to that of wit.<sup>96</sup>

Schlegel’s “wit” is clearly an intellectual faculty, and is inherently “artificial”, requiring aesthetic ‘shaping’ in order to be most effective.<sup>97</sup> This is reflected in the

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid. *Critical (Lyceum)* fragment 111 p. 14

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. *Athenaeum* fragment 121 p. 33

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. *Athenaeum* fragment 383 p. 78. Several of the *Athenaeum* fragments that mention wit and humour actually originate with August Wilhelm Schlegel. Each of these relates it specifically both to the comic and to humour: wit, for example, is paired with “frivolity” in fragment 58; fragment 237 considers that humour is “the wit of sentiment”, whilst in fragment 106 the “good intention of being witty . . . is the virtue of a clown.” In these last two fragments August Wilhelm also seems to argue that wit is an innate faculty, and functions best when there is a lack of intention (except the intention of “lifting the conventional barriers and liberating the spirit” (*Athenaeum* fragment 106)). Indeed he suggests that humour (and, by association, wit) ceases to be “genuine” the moment one perceives intention in it (*Athenaeum* fragment 237). Again, much of August Wilhelm’s conception of wit and humour reflects that seen in the discussion above. The crucial point is that there is presumably some relationship or correlation between his thought and his brother’s, simply by virtue of the fact that all of the fragments appeared in the same collection.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. *Ideas* fragment 123 p. 105

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. *Athenaeum* fragment 366 p. 75: “Understanding is mechanical, wit is chemical, genius is organic spirit”.

<sup>96</sup> *Athenaeum* 426, for example, states that “the novel, criticism, wit, sociability, the most recent rhetoric, and all previous history have a chemical makeup”. Ibid. *Athenaeum* fragment 426 p. 87

<sup>97</sup> *Lyceum* fragment 104, for example, relates wit to intellect, stating that it is reason that makes wit witty. Ibid. *Critical (Lyceum)* fragment 104 p. 12/13. See also *Lyceum* 16, 71, 96, *Athenaeum* 32, 383 and *Ideas* 26. Moreover, Schlegel’s assertion in *Athenaeum* fragment 394, that “real wit . . . is still only conceivable in written form, like laws”, largely due to its “classical form” displays a clear indication of aesthetic working, the ‘made’ quality discussed above (ibid. *Athenaeum* fragment 394 p. 80). The cognitive faculty that Schlegel associates with wit, however, is “fantastic” in nature: “Witz is pure thought-play; the understanding, on the contrary, works through thoughts purposefully and intentionally” (cited in Daverio, John (1993) “Dahlhaus’s Beethoven and the Esoteric Aesthetics of the Early Nineteenth Century” in Lockwood, Lewis and Webster, James (eds.) *Beethoven Forum*, vol. 2 p. 194). In privileging fancy over reason Schlegel follows, indeed parallels Locke’s much earlier definition of Wit, which associates it with fancy and opposes it to reason. In addition, see *Lyceum* 67,

brevity or “limited” quality of wit, required to achieve its fullest effect: Ideas 26, for example, compares it to the “lightening bolt of the imagination”.<sup>98</sup> Finally, the “conventional” relationship between wit, humour and the comic considered above is maintained. In Athenaeum fragment 305 (quoted above), for example, humour is the “groundstate”, wit occurs as a manifestation of this humour, the decorative element that enlivens it. Athenaeum fragment 156 reflects wit’s comic basis, considering the “comic wit” in Aristophanes, whilst fragment 120 states that “wit makes [us] laugh”.

Despite this “conventional” basis both Schlegel and Jean Paul indicate an expansion of the conception of wit. Jean Paul’s “profundity”, for example, approaches a type of “god-like” viewpoint: it is a “higher divine wit”<sup>99</sup> that is not limited to particular instances, a “capacity of the whole man . . . the whole tendency towards the invisible and the highest” that “strives for the equality and unity of all that wit has joined together in *perception*”.<sup>100</sup>

A similar expansion may be seen in the unpublished fragments that comprise Schlegel’s *Literary Notebooks*.<sup>101</sup> In his statement that “Everything is wit and

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90 and Ideas 109

<sup>98</sup> Schlegel (1991) *Ideas* fragment 26 p. 96. Here Schlegel doesn’t deny the limited scope of wit, but rather decries those who for this reason devalue it. Similarly, Athenaeum fragment 120 adds “they have so little regard for wit because its expressions aren’t long and wide enough” (ibid. *Athenaeum* fragment 120 p. 33). This again, demonstrates the limited extent of wit in Schlegel’s conception. In addition, see *Athenaeum* 217, which considers that “isolated wit” can “disturb the harmony of the whole” (ibid. *Athenaeum* fragment 217 p. 46), and Lyceum fragment 109, which discusses wit in terms of “the sharpest focus on a single point” (ibid. *Critical (Lyceum)* fragment 109 p. 13).

<sup>99</sup> Wheeler (1984) p. 187

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. Jean Paul distinguishes profundity from both wit and acumen, which might be described as wit in reverse. Acumen distinguishes between established similarities, discovering new and unsuspected contrasts and “a relationship of dissimilarity, i.e., of partial inequality, hidden in greater equality” (ibid.). It is interesting to note that Jean Paul’s differentiation of wit from acumen corresponds almost exactly to Locke’s distinction between wit and “judgement” quoted above. Locke considers that wit consists of the creation of congruities between different ideas, again a combinatory function. “Judgement”, in contrast, was the “separation of ideas wherein can be found the least difference”. This serves to underline the essentially traditional view of wit that Jean Paul outlines in his aesthetics.

<sup>101</sup> A word of caution needs to be added concerning the use of the *Literary Notebooks*. The fragments quoted below derive from Schlegel’s private notebooks: they were unpublished and, within his lifetime, were shown to only a few close friends (Schlegel (1957) p. 8). As such, although they provide background information on the genesis of Schlegel’s thought, they cannot really be considered as influential as his published works. Indeed, many of these fragments are the precursors of those that appear, in altered and expanded form, in the *Athenaeum* (which was published concurrently). Thus there is a case for considering the fragments of the *Athenaeum* as the final



everywhere is wit”<sup>102</sup> can be seen the expansion of the Enlightenment aesthetic of wit into an over-arching concept. The fundamental combinative power of wit seems to underlie much of human perception and activity; thus for example “all forms of poetry are witty”, and “All poetic wit is transcendental. Political wit is universal. Political wit may be written only poetically. – Combinatory wit is truly prophetic”.<sup>103</sup> Indeed in *Athenaeum* fragment 220 Schlegel considers wit “the principle and the organ of universal philosophy”, referring specifically to the philosophical systems of Bacon, Leibniz and Kant, which are described as “the spirit of universality, the science of all the eternally uniting and dividing sciences, a logical chemistry”.<sup>104</sup> This correspondence occurs in a very particular sense – between the “form” of wit and philosophy only. “Universal philosophy” shares the properties as wit – a combinatory, unifying power, an “aesthetic” element or intellectual ‘shaping’ and the elements of surprise. (In terms of “content”, however, Schlegel

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versions of many of the concepts in the *Notebooks* (and thus perhaps equivalent, in that regard, to the Beethoven sketchbooks): for these reasons I have tended for the most part to rely on the published fragments.

Perhaps more importantly, as Eichner states

“As is to be expected of notes written down on the spur of the moment, their quality is uneven. A part of Schlegel’s theoretical consideration is pedantic in the very worst tradition of the Greek writers on Rhetoric, others are based on wild generalisations . . . some entries are incomprehensible. Above all, the first impression created by these notebooks is not only one of a striking wealth and variety of ideas, but also one of utter chaos” (ibid. p. 6/7).

The overwhelming impression of these writings is of experimentation, of half-formed concepts and thoughts. Indeed, some of the ideas and equivalences that Schlegel draws are clearly experimental: one sees him pursuing different strains of an argument, often producing comments that appear to contradict both other fragments within the *Notebooks* and within the *Athenaeum*. This, together with Schlegel’s “predilection for such forms as the *Fragment* and the symposium, which enable an author to present a subject from different points of view and invite him to yield to momentary whims, his love of paradox and his highly individual or, as August Wilhelm would have it, ‘mythological’ terminology all combine to make his writings exceptionally difficult to interpret” (ibid. p. 4). Thus although Schlegel does draw comparisons between wit and irony it is not clear in what way these correspondences function. (Indeed, it is not even clear if, in drawing these comparisons, he means Romantic irony or the contrasting types of finite, “rhetorical” forms.) It is telling that in the published fragments the comprehensiveness of wit suggested in the notebooks, as well as the correspondences drawn between wit, irony and other concepts have largely been omitted. For these reasons great caution must be exercised in drawing too-specific conclusions from these fragments.

<sup>102</sup> Schlegel (1957) no. 782 p. 91

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. no. 2172, p. 215 and no. 568, p. 70

<sup>104</sup> Note that this reference to chemistry and to “uniting and dividing” is already related to the combinative power of wit described above.



acknowledges that philosophical systems are much more than mere poetic wit.)<sup>105</sup> Inflating the combinatory power of wit to correspond to the all-encompassing philosophical system of Kantian philosophy allows Schlegel to argue that, if the relationship holds, then the value of wit is limitless or infinite.<sup>106</sup>

Daverio argues, moreover, that Schlegel developed the concept of wit to the point where it forms “the principal agent of cohesiveness in a broad range of cultural products extending from Greek mythology and the Bible to Shakespeare’s dramas, Kantian philosophy, and the early nineteenth-century *Roman*”<sup>107</sup> and “the network of connective threads that bind together works belonging to the “epigrammatic genre””.<sup>108</sup> This important development expands wit’s scope from the momentary and “ornamental” to a guiding principle of philosophical communication. Indeed, his conception of wit becomes so wide that it encroaches upon the universal: Schlegel compares it to parody, grotesque, art and science, hieroglyphics, sarcasm, urbanity and caricature; he even asks whether wit is not “entirely identical” with genius.<sup>109</sup>

On occasion Schlegel draws the concepts of wit and irony together, producing apparent comparisons and equivalences. Indeed, irony appears as a type of wit: for example, “Irony is philosophical wit”;<sup>110</sup> “Romantic wit is the highest. – the satirical

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<sup>105</sup> Schlegel writes that “The most important scientific discoveries are bon mots [i.e. wit] of this sort – are so because of the surprising contingency of their origin, the unifying force of their thought, and the baroqueness of their casual expression. But they are, of course, in respect to content, much more than the unsatisfied and evanescent expectation of purely poetical wit. The best ones are *echappées de vue* into the infinite” (ibid. *Athenaeum* fragment 220 p. 47). Note that Schlegel’s use of the figuration “bon mots” to refer to instances of wit (i.e. to witty remarks) parallels Stewart’s use in his earlier discussion (Stewart (1792) p. 270).

<sup>106</sup> Note, however, that this type of “infinity” refers specifically to quantity: i.e. wit is of exceedingly great worth if such philosophical systems can be considered in terms of its characteristics. This is therefore different from the quality of the infinite that Schlegel bestows upon irony. It is also worth noting that the comparison that Schlegel makes here is itself almost metaphorical: in combining wit and philosophy Schlegel creates an idea that itself possesses all the combinative and surprising power of wit.

<sup>107</sup> Daverio (1993) p. 192

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. p. 194

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. no. 1030, p. 111, no. 1959, p. 193/194 and no. 1029, p. 111. Note that in the association with genius in this last fragment Schlegel’s conception of wit really touches upon Jean Paul’s conception of “profundity”.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. no. 2172, p. 215 also in no. 1959, p. 193

is next, and most similar to it. Socratic irony also belongs to it";<sup>111</sup> "Irony and Parody are the absolute types of wit; the first is ideal, the second real".<sup>112</sup> This relationship of wit as an overarching concept, with irony as a species of it, though, actually reflects the earlier association of wit with satire noted above.<sup>113</sup> This persists in Hazlitt's comment that "Wit . . . is the imagination or fancy inverted, and so applied to given objects, as to make the little look less, the mean more light and worthless".<sup>114</sup>

Nevertheless, the comparisons between wit and irony that Schlegel draws in these fragments seem aimed at pointing out the "overlapping" of certain elements, in particular the fundamental dialectical basis of opposition and contrariety that underlies both concepts, rather than suggesting a precise equivalence.<sup>115</sup> Although at times Schlegel seems to conceive of irony as a species of wit, this does not mean that wit is inherently ironic: whilst some instances of irony (particularly "rhetorical" forms) do have an element of wit in their dialectical structure, not every instance of wit will be ironic. This distinction is reflected in the important observation that in all cases although elements of these conceptions overlap, Schlegel nevertheless maintains a distinction between the two phenomena. This may initially be seen, on a superficial level, in the different terminology used: the fact that Schlegel maintained the use of different terms to describe the phenomena may, perhaps simplistically, be taken as an indication of a perceived difference.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid. no. 53, p. 24. Note, however, that in fragment 407 Schlegel argues that "The arabesque wit is the highest" (ibid. p.56), appearing to contrast this with irony and parody. This indicates, again, the experimental nature of the fragments and the apparent contradictions that sometimes occur.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. no. 1030, p. 111

<sup>113</sup> Indeed Edward Niles Hooker considers that "by the 1690's there had been a clear tendency to associate wit with mirth, and often with satire. By 1726 James Arbuckle could write ("A Collection of Letters", 1729, II, 72): "... Satire and Ridicule, which are the main Provocatives to Laughter, still keep their ground among us, and are reckoned the chief Embellishments of Discourse by all who aim at the Character of Wits'" (Hooker, Edward Niles (1946) *Introduction to the Series on Wit*, Augustan Reprints Society publication number 4, p. 4)

<sup>114</sup> Hazlitt (1818) p. 15

<sup>115</sup> It is also worth noting that Schlegel draws a similar equivalence between humour and wit: "Humour = poetic, sentimental, transcendental wit" (Schlegel (1957) no. 777 p. 91). This, once again, indicates that the equivalences that Schlegel draws are not absolute or unqualified, but rather point out common elements in all three conceptions – irony, wit and humour.

<sup>116</sup> Indeed, it is notable that even in the comparisons that Schlegel draws between wit and irony, this is not to the specifically *Romantic* irony that he discusses elsewhere in these fragments. This difference reflects the distinction that Steven Alford draws, considered below. Moreover, the fact that

More importantly, there are significant differences in the underlying processes of wit and Romantic irony. Wit is fundamentally combinatory, a creation of relationship between disparate ideas or objects; even the developments and expansion of wit's meaning and significance that Schlegel and Jean Paul undertook retained this fundamental combinatory power.<sup>117</sup> Like metaphor, wit is an essentially "additive" process, comparing disparate, even incongruous elements and, by virtue of the combinations and relationships that it discovers, augmenting both elements, creating a new, richer meaning for both. The combinations of wit are not, by their nature, inherently ironic, just as metaphors (and their extended forms) are not intrinsically ironic: they are simply witty.

In particular the relationship of wit to figures such as metaphor, simile and allegory, distinguishes it from Romantic irony. Romantic Irony is not fundamentally combinatory; rather, the emphasis placed upon paradox means that it is inherently divisive – it separates by antithesis and paradox.<sup>118</sup> Irony is thus not an additive process, but rather a continual contrast.<sup>119</sup> This difference led Hegel, and later Kierkegaard, to describe it as a constant negation, as "infinite, absolute negativity".<sup>120</sup> Irony does not add "meaning" to the elements of the paradox: rather the constant alternation of creation and destruction produces a "stasis" of meaning,

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these phenomena remained, to a certain extent, distinct is indicated not least by the fact that there are a great number of fragments that deal with irony separately from wit.

<sup>117</sup> It is important to bear in mind that Schlegel's theory of irony was much more influential than his writing on wit, both in relation to his contemporaries and especially in the decades following (See Behler (1993) p. 210). The notion of Romantic irony was worked out in discussion with the Jena circle and in response to the writings of Solger and Jean Paul, and generated much critical comment. Crucially, it was this ongoing discussion that ensured the wider dissemination of the theory of Romantic irony, and its influence upon later critical thought and artistic practice.

<sup>118</sup> As Barthes states "The antithesis [paradoxism] separates for eternity". Barthes (1974) *S/Z* p. 27

<sup>119</sup> In addition, see Wayne Booth's comparison of irony and metaphor, which differentiates between them on the basis that metaphor is essentially a positive accretion of meaning, whilst irony is a continual negation (Booth (1974) p. 22-25 and 176-178). However, it is worth noting the possibility that witty combinations such as metaphors may subsequently be used ironically. The metaphor "John is a tiger", for example, becomes ironic when used in an incongruous context i.e. if John is actually a noticeably shy individual. Nevertheless, in such cases there is an extra incongruous element added "between" the metaphor and the context, and it is here that the irony resides. Crucially though, even in this case the irony that results is "satirical" in nature: it is not *Romantic* irony.

<sup>120</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren (1841) *The Concept of Irony, With Continual Reference to Socrates* p. 216/217

which Kierkegaard describes as being held on the “prong” of irony.<sup>121</sup> Thus although wit may underlie systematic philosophy or bring coherence to the epigrammatic genre, irony produces the opposite effect: in “On Incomprehensibility” Schlegel actually argues that irony produces *incomprehension*.<sup>122</sup> Romantic irony does not create new combinations or meanings, rather it renders “meaning” meaningless; by signifying only itself irony’s only “meaning” is itself.<sup>123</sup> As Mihály Szegedy-Maszák (quoting Paul de Man) writes “Romantic irony is anti-didactic, it is “an endless process that leads to no synthesis”. It is not temporary or transition, but “repetitive, the recurrence of a self-escalating act of consciousness””.<sup>124</sup>

This statement highlights the final and most important distinction. Romantic irony is an infinite process, a constant alternation between self-creation and self-destruction, a continual paradox. In contrast, wit in all its forms is, as seen, a fundamentally finite process. It is by definition limited in extent, its momentary flashes of combinatory brilliance opposed to the infinite reflective function of Schlegel’s irony.<sup>125</sup> Schlegel does draw comparisons between the dialectical bases of irony and “combinatory wit”: both involve the relationships of dialectical opposites. However, even at this point of apparent overlap or synonymy he maintains a crucial distinction. Steven Alford explains this essential difference by separating Romantic irony into two elements. The first is the continual, “dialectical” movement between assertion and negation, the infinite spiral of creation and destruction or “comprehensibility and

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid. p. 269

<sup>122</sup> “A great part of the incomprehensibility of the *Athenaeum* is unquestionably due to the irony that to a greater or lesser extent is to be found everywhere in it” (Wheeler (1984) p. 36). In contrast, in *Lyceum* 96 Schlegel considers that the “meaning” of wit should be “clear” as soon as it has been hit upon. The clarity of meaning in wit is therefore directly opposed to the incomprehensibility of irony.

<sup>123</sup> See Kierkegaard (1841) p. 264

<sup>124</sup> Szegedy-Maszák, Mihály (1988) “Romantic Irony in Nineteenth-Century Hungarian Literature” in Frederick Garber (ed.) *Romantic Irony* p. 205

<sup>125</sup> Even “profundity” differs in that it is an all-encompassing viewpoint that is nevertheless “external”; it sets the self “outside” the world, contemplating it and its manifold “witty” connections from above. It is, in addition, simply as a personal quality, rather than an aesthetic phenomenon. (Jean Paul, at least, seems to understand it in this way, a view supported by the fact that he gives no examples of it.) As such its process differs from both the continual reflection of self-creation and destruction involved in irony, as well as from irony’s inherent association with aesthetic endeavour. An ironic self-consciousness is an essential aspect of the Romantic artist’s makeup, but this is explicitly connected with his work: as Muecke considers, Romantic irony is the infinite irony of “the ironical presentation of the ironic position of the fully conscious artist”. Muecke (1970) p. 20



incomprehensibility” considered above.<sup>126</sup> The second arises from this: the “exhaustion brought about by the play of the ironic dialectic in the text”<sup>127</sup> forces an awareness of the condition of finitude that creates the dialectic (the “finite” position of *having* to think in terms of dialectical opposites). This produces a type of transcendence of “finitude”, an epiphanic process in which the finite and infinite or the whole and the part are unified in the reader’s perception. (This unity is, however, doomed to failure: because of our condition of finitude, such romantic irony – “the stylistic binding of the infinite and the finite”<sup>128</sup> – is “an unstable and destabilizing mode of irony that is forever falling back into dialectical irony”).<sup>129</sup>

Alford terms this second element as irony’s “performative” function – the point of such irony is not to signify a meaning, but rather to “force toward an effect” *beyond* meaning, the transcendental effect of the ironic understanding.<sup>130</sup> Crucially, wit lacks this performative function: wit is, by definition, circumscribed in the “finitude”, its combinations a result of the finitude of our limited cognitions that distinguish actuality into oppositions. Being inherently bound to the finite, wit is thus unable to perform the transcendental uniting of finite and infinite that occurs in Romantic irony.<sup>131</sup> In other words, lacking the performative element wit cannot make the important existential claims that Romantic irony can (claims that will be considered more fully in chapter 5).

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<sup>126</sup> Alford, Steven E (1984) *Irony and the Logic of the Romantic Imagination* p. 94

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. p. 95

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. p. 31

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. It should be noted that this would, of course, itself create an infinite movement from dialectic to ironic transcendence and back.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. p. 73

<sup>131</sup> Indeed, Schlegel relates irony to poetry which, he considers, transcends the dialectical movement of opposites that is an inherent, inseparable aspect of “systems” of thought based upon finite cognition and perception: it unites the finite with the infinite in the perception of the artist and the reader. The continual motion of assertion and negation, creation and destruction forces (or perhaps allows) the abandonment of finite thinking by destroying its basis – this destruction produces the momentary transcendence that is the final aim of Romantic irony.



## Musical Wit and Humour

The distinctions between wit, humour and Romantic irony that have been seen in the preceding discussion are important in relation to the late Beethoven quartets that will be analysed in the next two chapters. The differences between these phenomena, which persisted even in the context of Romantic thought, may, crucially, be seen reflected in the music of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. As will be seen, there are musical instances of wit and humour that correspond well both with earlier conceptions of wit and humour, and to later versions like Jean Paul's. In other words, these instances may be fully accounted for by the conventional definitions of wit and humour.

However, the type of irony that will be demonstrated in Beethoven's late quartets differs significantly from the instances of musical wit and humour that may be seen in Mozart, Haydn and in earlier Beethoven; it is for this reason that the relationships and distinctions between the three phenomena were outlined above. Although it is related to the wit and humour of Beethoven's predecessors, the irony of these quartets is unique, and of a different order to these earlier instances. I consider that this difference may be understood as corresponding to those in contemporaneous thought between the concepts of wit and humour, and Schlegel's Romantic irony. The definitions of wit and humour considered above are inadequate to account for these late works: the juxtapositions and incongruities analysed within these late works are not fundamentally witty, combinatorial or "metaphorical" in effect, nor are they cohesive or systematic. Rather, I suggest that they produce the constant alteration of creation and destruction, the continual paradox of Schlegelian irony that accounts for the incomprehension to their contemporaneous audience. The A minor quartet in particular produces a constant dialectical movement of comprehension and incomprehension, finite and infinite that, through the force of the music, pushes the listener beyond the perception of meaning into the performative effect of Romantic irony.

In order to demonstrate this difference, however, it is important to consider the manner in which wit and humour function in music. In a sense it is easier to demonstrate instances of musical wit than it is to demonstrate musical humour: Charles Rosen, for example, describes musical wit as “the incongruous seen as exactly right, the out-of-place suddenly turning out to be just where it ought to be” and as “a surprising change of nonsense into sense”.<sup>132</sup> His examples of wit focus on the integration of an initially problematic incongruity into the subsequent course of the movement, as an essential element of its structure. He centres on double-meanings, arguing that the use of reinterpretation, the clear articulation and differentiation of melody and accompaniment, and the sharp distinction between tonal areas within the “Classical” style allowed the double-meanings necessary for wit and humour to function.<sup>133</sup> The emphasis on reinterpretation, for example, meant that what was initially incongruous could subsequently be seen to be central – i.e. the surprising relationship between incongruities that defines wit.

The enharmonic manipulation seen in Haydn’s D major Trio H. 7, for example, produces a witty pun of the type that Rosen considers as the highest form of musical wit.<sup>134</sup> The E flat which occurs as the dominant of A flat in bar 86 is subsequently heard as D# – the third of B major; the momentary combination of two tonal areas produces a double meaning that functions as a “joke” because of the sharp distinction between tonalities that was essential to the Classical style.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Rosen (1971) p. 96 and 98

<sup>133</sup> Rosen also makes an important connection between humour, wit and the operatic origins of Viennese Classicism. He argues that comedy and wit were an inherent element of the style because of the heritage of *opera buffa* from which it draws (ibid. p. 96). Chua’s recent assessment of wit and irony in the “Classical” style follows on from Rosen’s comments. He considers that the inherent “chemical” nature of the style, seen for example in the combination of seemingly incongruous topics, may be considered ironic because, according to him, such witty combinations are inherently ironic (Chua (1999) p. 201–204). In addition he considers the sonata forms of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven as inherently ironic for similar reasons: sonata form, he argues, is inherently contradictory, producing a “self-consciousness” that “simultaneously insists on and resists all definitions of its form” (ibid. p. 210), whilst the type of manipulation of the form Haydn’s produces an “ironic scrutiny” (ibid. p. 213). As will be seen, however, although Viennese Classicism may be based upon wit and humour there are significant differences between wit and irony, particularly Romantic irony.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid. p. 96

<sup>135</sup> The conventional formulas of the classical modulation offered similar scope for wit. Rosen argues that “all we need . . . is one moment when we are not sure what the meaning of a note is” (Rosen (1972) p. 98), giving an example from Haydn’s quartet Op. 33. Other examples of “witty” relationships include the contrast of melodic and accompanimental parts in Haydn’s famous *Clock*

Ex. 3.1 Haydn Piano Trio No. 7

(Allegro Assai)

The musical score for Haydn Piano Trio No. 7, measures 80-90, is presented in three staves: Violin (Vln.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Piano (Pno.). The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) for measures 80-89. At measure 90, the key signature changes to D major (two sharps). The Violin and Violoncello parts have rests from measure 90 onwards. The Piano part continues with a new melodic line in the right hand and a rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic.

Indeed, instances of such musical wit are frequently attributed to Haydn, particularly to several well-known examples from his quartets.<sup>136</sup> The finale of the “Joke” quartet (considered in the previous chapter) is perhaps the most obvious: the use of the opening theme as the final gesture of the movement produces a combinatory effect, an unlikely mixture of opening and closing, theme and closural figure.<sup>137</sup> Similarly, the use of an explicitly “closural” gesture – a repeated perfect cadence – as the opening of the finale of Op. 76 number 5 produces a witty double function: the gesture is at once closural and thematic. The subsequent use of this figure as

Symphony: the subsequent re-distribution of these is considered witty (ibid. p. 97). Similarly, the contrasts of register in Beethoven’s *Diabelli* variations and Haydn’s Op. 33 no. 3 quartet are considered “grotesquely funny” (ibid. p. 95).

<sup>136</sup> See, for example, Wheelock’s extensive analysis of Haydn’s wit and humour (Wheelock (1992)).

<sup>137</sup> I am here ignoring the uncertainty that arises at this point regarding where the movement ends. The “satirical” effect that this moment produces will be considered later in this chapter.

sequential and modulatory material produces a further combinatory elision of functions. Both these instances thus present the type of witty relationships identified above: a strikingly novel combination or use of language that is subsequently clarified, eliciting the surprise and even laughter seen frequently in descriptions of wit.

Ex. 3.2 Haydn Op. 76 no. 5 Finale

Finale, Presto

The musical score is for the Finale, Presto of Haydn's Op. 76 no. 5. It consists of three systems of staves for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The key signature is D major (two sharps) and the time signature is 2/4. The first system (measures 1-8) shows a dynamic shift from *f* to *p* in measures 7 and 8. The second system (measures 9-15) begins with a measure rest in measure 9, followed by a *p* dynamic marking in measure 10. The third system (measures 16-23) begins with a measure rest in measure 16, followed by a *f* dynamic marking in measure 17.

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

9

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

16

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Like Rosen, Dahlhaus draws a connection between wit and Classicism. He, though, relates the combinatory power of wit to the type of similarities and indirect relationships between and within themes in certain of Beethoven's early and middle-period works. For example, he considers the manner in which the principle motive of the finale of quartet Op. 18 no. 5 occurs extensively throughout the movement, producing unexpected relationships with the second subject, as a case of wit's combinatory power. In addition, he identifies witty, Haydnesque reversals of function in Beethoven's work. The opening four bars of the first movement of Op. 18 no 5, for example, produce a witty relationship: they are both introductory and thematic, the first two bars functioning as introduction to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, which are themselves clearly based upon these preceding bars. This conflation of introductions and themes resolves itself at the end of the work, producing a clarification of the wit – a moment of understanding.

Ex. 3.3 Beethoven Op. 18 no. 5 1st Movement

Allegro

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

*f* *sf* *sf* *sf* *p*

Daverio, however, argues that wit is actually most pertinent to Beethoven's late works. In particular, he considers that the "abstract subthematicism" characteristic of the late style produces *witzig* connections within works such as the late sonatas and quartets. The 4-note motivic element that informs Op. 130, 131, 132 and the Grosse Fuge, for example, provides a connective thread between these disparate works. He argues that such "long-range" connections relate to Schlegel's understanding of wit's



function as a “network” of loose connections between fragments.<sup>138</sup> However, despite Daverio’s assertion, I will argue that wit is most appropriate to Beethoven’s earlier period(s); conventional forms of wit are most clearly seen in his earlier output, where the influence of Haydn is most clearly felt.<sup>139</sup> The late works draw upon these earlier models, and yet differ significantly: certain works, like the Op. 132 quartet are informed throughout with irony.

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Where specific instances of incongruous connections or double-meanings may produce musical wit, musical humour is a more general quality. Reichardt’s description of Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven as “the three true humorists”,<sup>140</sup> for example, recognises the particular qualities of their individual “humours” or genius –

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<sup>138</sup> The problem with this viewpoint, however, is that, whilst the thematic link between the late quartets undoubtedly exists, these works are constituted as individual works, with different opus numbers etc. These works must therefore, despite their common thematic basis be considered as autonomous and complete in themselves, rather than as in some sense forming a “whole” (despite Deryck Cooke’s assertion to the contrary). As such these works are not placed in an antithetical relationship and as a result there is no “clever” or “surprising” combination of these works arising from their shared thematic basis. There is, in other words, no wit. Moreover, whereas there may be a witzig connection between the individual fragments within the three collections that Schlegel published, this differs markedly from the type of witty connection that Daverio asserts in the late quartets. Schlegel’s fragments actually exist in juxtaposition, within the same collection, thus wit combines disparate elements “within”, as it were, the same work. This therefore accords to the traditional view of wit as combinatory and lightening quick, and differs significantly from the connections between the autonomous late quartets.

<sup>139</sup> It will be noted that the instances of musical wit and, as will be seen, humour that have been given have been drawn entirely from Haydn’s works. The reasons for this are twofold. Firstly, it is noticeable that associations of wit and humour are most frequently made with Haydn’s music: these works most clearly display the qualities considered. Secondly, Haydn’s influence upon Beethoven is important (perhaps more so than Mozart’s): the wit and humour of Haydn can be seen in earlier Beethoven and form important precedents for the Romantic irony of the later works. Nevertheless, it is important to note that important instances of humour and wit may also be seen in Mozart. Chua’s analysis of Mozart’s *Jupiter* Symphony, for example, highlights a combination of apparently contradictory topics in the main theme of the first movement (Chua (1999) p. 203-208). Although he considers this combination ironic, I would argue that both this combination and its subsequent treatment throughout the movement accord perfectly with the conventional definitions of wit seen above: the continual combining and recombining of these thematic elements produces a relationship between apparently antithetical elements that is frequently surprising and dazzling in effect and which, moreover, displays the intellectual and fanciful caprice of the composer.

<sup>140</sup> Reichardt, Johann (1810) *Vertraute Briefe geschrieben auf einer Reise nach Wien . . . 1808/9*, 14<sup>th</sup> letter (16<sup>th</sup> December 1808). Translated Wheelock (1992) p. 50/51

their originality, breaking of conventional models, and innovative use of conventional language – rather than simply the comic elements of their music.<sup>141</sup>

Nevertheless, humour is most often associated with Haydn's music, in particular the metrical play of his dance movements.<sup>142</sup> By disrupting the rhythm and periodicity of the music Haydn undermines the essential dance-like quality of such movements. Such instances problematise these forms by producing "dances" that simply cannot be danced to. The humour involved in this process undermines not simply musical "good-behaviour", but also the social conventions that are correlated with dance forms; it is an expression of Haydn's "natural" jesting with serious topics.

The scherzo from quartet Op. 33 number 5 is characteristic: the hemiola figures in the opening theme, augmented by the static harmony and continual pulse of the accompaniment, establish the metrical uncertainty and conflict that underpins much of the movement. This is compounded by further metric and harmonic displacements: the rest in bar 8 diverts the expected cadence, thereby disrupting the periodicity of the phrase by extending it to ten bars. Similarly, the fermata in bar 16 disrupts the re-established pulse by halting the music in an unlikely place (the middle of a phrase), whilst the apparent repeat of the opening that follows is aborted in the final hemiola. Finally, the conflicting accents from bar 21 broaden the metrical problems, before introducing hemiola figures in the remote key of B flat.

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<sup>141</sup> Reichardt's description occurs within the context of his comments upon a concert at Count Razumovsky's in which quartets by the three composers were heard. He compares the manner in which each composer develops the genre:

Haydn created it from the pure, bright source of his delightful, original nature. Naïveté and gay humour are thus always his unique features. Mozart's more powerful nature and richer fantasy enabled him to express in many works the heights and depths of his inner being . . . he also valued artful modulations more highly and thus built his palace on Haydn's lovely, fantastic summer house. Beethoven himself was at home in this palace early on; thus it remained for him only to express his own nature in a unique way, in building defiant towers on which no one could place anything further without breaking his neck. (Ibid.)

Reichardt's comments demonstrate his understanding of the "humour" of these composers. Here humour is equated with the "heights and depths" of each individual nature: each was unique, although Mozart and Beethoven built upon Haydn's humour.

<sup>142</sup> Wheelock (1992) p. 55

Scherzo. Allegro

Vln. I  
 Vln. II  
 Vla.  
 Vc.

*sf sf sf p*  
*sf sf sf sf sf p*  
*sf sf sf sf sf p*  
*sf sf sf sf sf p*

Haydn's humour also manifests itself in bizarre creations like the Scherzo from the quartet Op. 33 no. 3. The strange "scherzo" is homophonic throughout, the low register and restricted compass, combined with the restrained dynamics and *sotto voce* indication, producing a subdued atmosphere that contradicts its 'jesting' title. The quaver motion and high register of the trio, which excludes viola and cello entirely, produces a much thinner texture, its lighter, quasi-contrapuntal nature in marked contrast to the low, homophonic crotchet rhythms of the scherzo.

Ex. 3.5 Haydn Op. 33 no. 3 2nd movement

Scherzando. Allegretto

Violin I  
 Violin II  
 Viola  
 Cello

*sotto voce*  
*sotto voce*  
*sotto voce*  
*sotto voce*

*sf sf sf*  
*sf sf sf*  
*sf sf sf*  
*sf sf sf*

The characteristics of both sections are exaggerated to produce the maximum contrast, and this overstated opposition foregrounds the irregularity of the individual elements. Thus the "normal" contrasts of such movements here actually become "abnormal". Haydn's humorous flouting of convention is here doubled: he breaks

the normal boundaries of convention, whilst appearing to adhere strictly to the “correct” principle of the movement.

Ex. 3.6 Op. 33 no. 3 2nd movement. Trio

Significantly, Jean Paul identifies Haydn’s alternating of opposites and destruction of tonal schemes as similar to humour.

Something similar to the audacity of annihilating humour, an expression of scorn for the world, can be perceived in a good deal of music, like that of Haydn, which destroys entire tonal sequences by introducing an extraneous key and storms alternately between pianissimo and fortissimo, presto and andante.<sup>143</sup>

Such a “storming alternation” occurs in the opening movement of Haydn’s quartet Op. 76 no. 5. Following the fugato treatment of the main theme there is an abrupt change to entirely new material in bar 41: the rapid scale and arpeggio motion, tremolandos and alternating figuration contradict the steady motion and gentle counterpoint of the main theme. This sudden change foregrounds the change of key:

<sup>143</sup> Wheeler (1984) p. 178



although B flat is expected, the juxtaposition of material is not. It ends unexpectedly, however, with the main theme returning (in B flat) after the repeated chords in bar 46 halt the music's motion altogether. It is the abruptness of these juxtapositions that surprises, producing an apparent incongruity that fractures the continuity of the preceding music – the type of “annihilating” humour that Jean Paul identifies.

Ex. 3.7 Haydn Op. 76 no. 5 1st movement

The image displays three systems of musical notation for the first movement of Haydn's Op. 76 no. 5. The first system (measures 40-43) features Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. Violin I has a measure rest in measure 40, while Violin II, Viola, and Cello play continuous eighth-note patterns. A dynamic marking of *f* appears in measure 41. The second system (measures 44-45) continues the patterns for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The third system (measures 46-47) shows the same instruments. In measure 46, all instruments play sustained chords, and the music halts. In measure 47, the strings play a final chord. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats), and the time signature is 8/8.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*p*

*p*

*p*

*f*

*p*

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*f*

*f*

*f*

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

50

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

This intrusion, however, is subsequently worked into the remainder of the movement. The rapid scale motion in bars 49 to 57 acts as a countersubject to a fragment of the main theme, producing a variation of the contrapuntal working of the development.<sup>144</sup> Similarly, the scales and tremolando accompaniment from bar 107 in the coda are clearly related to the earlier interruption. These instances transform the meaning of the initial interruption: its surprising incongruity is subsequently combined with the preceding material, integrated into the form of the work in order to form a new combination. Thus, in retrospect, the dramatic change at bar 41 is necessary to the movement; it defines and extends its form, creating new “meanings” by adding drama and contrast to an otherwise single-theme form. This movement thus produces the combination of wit and humour considered above: the “annihilation” of the humour is incorporated into the movement via the combinatory power of wit.<sup>145</sup>

Although Jean Paul’s association of Haydn’s music with his expanded conception of humour is significant, it is important to note that he only identifies a correspondence between such instances and the “audacity” of humour: it is the striking quality of their unexpected effect that relates to humour. Indeed, although such instances are *similar* to humour, Jean Paul does not draw a complete parallel. His comments do imply a correspondence with the comic effects and destruction of illusion that he earlier identifies in the “humour” of Sterne and Tieck.<sup>146</sup> Nevertheless, although Haydn’s music produces the contrast and annihilation that he identifies with such humour it is limited to the contrast of opposites, rather than the crucial contrast of the

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<sup>144</sup> Compare with bars 29 to 34 and 37 to 39 with bars 49 to 51.

<sup>145</sup> Precisely the same process occurs in Haydn’s quartet Op. 54 no. 2. Chua analyses this work in relation to Jean Paul’s statement regarding annihilation, considering the interruption of the tonic by the flattened submediant in the exposition as an annihilation of the tonic by an intrusion of an extraneous key. However, he also argues that this intrusion may be understood in light of events later in the movement, namely the “massive block of A flat major, placed where it should be – at the close and as a structural cadence” (Chua (1999) p. 215). Thus, again, there is a combination of an apparent humorous incongruity that is subsequently *resolved* through the combinatory power of wit. Although Chua considers this process as ironic, I would argue that it is simply an archetypal instance of the combination of wit and humour: although Haydn’s manipulation of the form is a demonstration of his own artistic awareness, more importantly it is, as with all humour, a comic effect designed to tease his audience (particularly the unaware or naïve). This process is markedly different from the transcendental paradoxes of Romantic irony.

<sup>146</sup> In this regard, Jean Paul’s comments mirror the frequent associations that contemporaries made between Haydn and Sterne. See Bonds (1991) p. 59-63

particular and general, finite and infinite that defines his “romantic comic”. Such instances, in other words, lack the “existential” element that is central to Jean Paul’s humour.<sup>147</sup>

Indeed, in this context it is interesting to note Sulzer’s comments that “to express violent or other vehement affections, the harmonic progressions should be interrupted by modulations to distant keys”.<sup>148</sup> This implies that the type of interruption and alternations that Jean Paul identifies as humorous in Haydn could also be understood differently, in terms of the more conventional “Sturm und Drang”, for example. In other words, not every alternation or interruption of tonalities will prompt a “humorous”, or even “ironic” interpretation.<sup>149</sup>

Sulzer’s comments, however, also highlight the important consideration that such instances, including cases of wit and humour were, to a certain extent, a normative, indeed expected element of the style that Beethoven inherited from Mozart and Haydn.<sup>150</sup> Indeed, Griesinger’s comments, for example, demonstrate that Haydn’s humour – “the very spirit of Austrian cheerfulness”<sup>151</sup> – was an accepted aspect of his style, whilst Dies inextricably connects this to his artistic character:

In his compositions this caprice [humour] is most striking, and his allegros and rondeaux are especially often planned to tease the audience by wanton shifts from the seemingly serious to the highest level of comedy, and to be tuned to an almost wild hilarity.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Moreover, it is significant that Jean Paul identifies Haydn’s music as similar to the effect of humour, rather than irony. As seen, Jean Paul differentiates humour from both “rhetorical” and Romantic forms or irony. Indeed, the basis of the “humour” that he sees in Haydn is not related to Romantic irony, which, as seen above, centres on paradox, on “everything simultaneously good and great”, and on “sublime urbanity”. Rather humour centres simply on annihilation and on “scorn for the world”, and therefore, as will be seen below, produces results closer to the “finite” effect of “proto-romantic”. Thus to label Haydn’s work as Romantic irony, simply because Jean Paul describes it in terms of humour is misleading in that it ignores the crucial elements of Schlegel’s Romantic irony that do not occur within it.

<sup>148</sup> Sulzer (1771-74) trans. Baker (1995) p. 52

<sup>149</sup> This point has also been made more recently by Hatten, who suggests a number of possible non-ironic interpretations for such disruptive instances. See Hatten, Robert S. (2004) *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics and Tropes: Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert* p. 268-270.

<sup>150</sup> The type of metrical play seen in the minuet from Haydn’s Op. 33 no. 5, for example, became a “stock-in-trade” of the “Classical” style.

<sup>151</sup> Griesinger, Georg August (1810) *Biographische Notizen über Joseph Haydn*, translated Vernon Gotwals (1968) *Haydn: Two Contemporary Portraits* p. 57

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. See also Wheelock’s statement that “a recurring theme in [critic’s] perceptions of Haydn’s

Woven into Haydn's character is a genial, witty, teasing strain, but with it always the innocence of a child. His musical output attests to this.<sup>153</sup>

In his character there was much cheerfulness, jest and musical wit both popular and refined, but original to the highest degree. It has often been called humour, from which is rightly derived Haydn's bent for musical teasing.<sup>154</sup>

These descriptions demonstrate that wit, humour and even extreme contrasts were not problematic but rather were stylistically acceptable, inherently associated with Haydn's unique artistic humour. Indeed, these quotations highlight the fact that humorous elements were, to a certain extent, actually *conventional* – humour was intrinsic in the conception of the quartet that Beethoven inherited from his predecessors. Moreover, they demonstrate the point made earlier: that contemporaneous definitions of wit and humour are perfectly adequate to account for such instances. For example, the instances of humour seen in Haydn's work accord perfectly with Michaelis' description of musical humour:

Music is humorous if the composition betrays more the disposition [*Laune*] of the composer than the strict application of an artistic system. The musical ideas are extremely peculiar and unusual; they do not follow one another in the manner one might expect, say, on the basis of certain conventions or according to the natural progressions of harmony or modulation. Instead, these ideas surprise us through turns of phrase and transitions that are entirely unexpected, or by wholly new and unusually juxtaposed figures . . . The humorous composer distinguishes himself by means of unusual ideas that cause one to smile; he sets himself above and beyond the ordinary".<sup>155</sup>

Significantly, since instances of wit and humour were, to an extent, an expected part of the "Classical" style, such devices were actually somewhat anachronistic by the time of the late quartets. The importance of this is that such devices were not really viable in Beethoven's late works: in order to be effective, irony would need to manifest itself differently.<sup>156</sup> As a result, as will be seen, the irony in the late

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musical humour is his matchless balance of the grand and the playful" (Wheelock (1992) p. 27).

<sup>153</sup> Dies, Albert Christopher (1810) *Biographische Nachrichten von Joseph Haydn*, trans Vernon Gotwals *Haydn: Two Contemporary Portraits*, p. 145

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.* p. 203

<sup>155</sup> Michaelis, Christian Friedrich *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 9, no. 47 (12<sup>th</sup> August 1807). Quoted in Bonds (1991) p. 77/78

<sup>156</sup> Indeed, Rosen considers that wit of the type he identifies was not actually possible in the Romantic period. The loosening of key relationships "nullifies the effect of wit altogether" (Rosen (1972) p. 98); Romantic modulations, for example, became so chromatic that "the two keys blend into



quartets differs significantly from the wit and humour of Viennese Classicism. Indeed Beethoven's late works are so different from the music of his predecessors that, where definitions of wit and humour can adequately encapsulate Haydn's humour, the processes of these works simply cannot be accounted for by either the conventional or indeed Romantic conceptions of wit and humour.<sup>157</sup> Rather, the continual paradoxes and infinite motion of assertion and negation that will be seen within these works relate to those of Schlegel's Romantic irony.

Yet the Romantic irony of these works does relate to the music of Beethoven's predecessors. Just as the concept of Romantic irony is, as was considered, related to but distinct from the concepts of humour and wit, so too Beethoven's Romantic irony is related to the humorous, witty "Classical" style. Indeed, in some cases the irony of these works draws on these earlier devices, transforming them from anachronism by raising them to the second power, a process that parallels Schlegel's "irony of irony".<sup>158</sup> This produces a historical progression or development: the humour and wit of Mozart and Haydn (and indeed earlier Beethoven) form important precursors to Beethoven's Romantic irony, in the same way that Sterne's humour influenced the works of Tieck, Brentano and Schlegel.

### **"Proto-Romantic" irony**

This progression may be understood in relation to the distinction that Muecke draws between romantic and "Proto-romantic" irony. He observes that devices such as 'authorial' interruptions – which remind the observer that the artwork is "only a painting, a play, or a novel and not the reality it purports to be"<sup>159</sup> – occur frequently in works preceding the conception of Romantic irony.<sup>160</sup> He designates such cases

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each other, and are often much slower and gradual" (ibid.). Thus whilst there are instances of wit similar to those of Haydn throughout Beethoven's earlier works the expansion of tonality made this type of "Classical" wit less viable for his late style.

<sup>157</sup> This is perhaps reflected in the perennial fascination of commentators with the late style and the common perception that, to an extent, the late works (particularly the late quartets) stand apart in some way.

<sup>158</sup> Wheeler (1984) p. 37

<sup>159</sup> Muecke (1969) p. 164

<sup>160</sup> He gives examples from Aristophanes, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Diderot and, of course,

as proto-romantic irony, in order to indicate both the critical historical development of the concept and the difference between these and the later concept.

Lilian Furst's comments indicate an important element of this distinction. She considers that

the impetus for such Proto-romantic irony might be described as negative since its purpose is a reduction of the work of art from autonomous standing to its proper place in the scheme of the universe as "only a painting, a play, or a novel". By contrast, in true Romantic irony the breaking of illusion is positive in intent for it aims to demonstrate the artist's elevation over his work, his transcendence even of his own creation.<sup>161</sup>

Significantly, this distinction can also be made with regard to the examples considered above: certain aspects of the wit and humour of Haydn and Mozart may be considered forerunners of the Romantic irony seen in later Beethoven. Devices like false recapitulations and unexpected tonal diversions, for example, produce a "breaking" of aesthetic convention and illusion. The authorial manipulation in Haydn's "Joke" quartet, for example, breaks the aesthetic illusion by contrasting the "expected" function of the ending with the "open" way it actually finishes. This produces incongruities between the conventions of the artwork, the inherent assumptions of the listener and actuality.

Although it might be argued that such instances do produce irony, there are two important points to consider. The first of these is historical: the "irony" in these works is understood as such only *because* of the later conception of irony developed by Schlegel. The German Romantics, particularly Schlegel and the Jena circle, were not simply following practice with theory; rather, they were consciously prescribing aesthetic theory for future works to follow.<sup>162</sup> Thus, for example, Behler underlines the "tension" between Classicism and modernism (Romanticism), in Schlegel's

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Sterne (ibid. p. 165 – 177)

<sup>161</sup> Furst, Lilian (1998) "Romantic Irony and Narrative Stance" in Frederick Garber (ed.) *Romantic Irony* p. 301

<sup>162</sup> This prescriptive element arises, at least in part, from the "nationalistic" aspect of the Romantics' agenda: they wished to establish specifically German literature – focussing particularly on the novel – which would always be Romantic in character. They looked both to Classical antiquity and to the authors identified above in order to validate the claims of this new, national literature.

writing: Schlegel argued not for “the restitution of a classical mythology, but the creation of a contemporary, up-to-date “new mythology”, not the rejuvenation of the Homeric epic, but the creation of the modern novel as an expression of subjective transcendental poetry”.<sup>163</sup> In trying to establish Romanticism they looked to Cervantes, Goethe and Shakespeare both to validate their ideas and as models for future works, but these authors were not considered as ‘full’ representations of Romantic irony.<sup>164</sup>

Similarly, we recognise in “Classical” humour and wit expressions related to irony.<sup>165</sup> Crucially, however, although these form important precursors of later instances of Romantic irony, such antecedents do not correspond to the full sense of the term. Rather, I would argue that the “ironic” effect of these instances is closer to Proto-romantic irony. For example, there is often a strong element of satirical corrective in Haydn’s “jokes”: such instances seem aimed at exposing and mocking the expectations and assumptions of the unwary or “conventional” listeners, in particular the belief in the aesthetic illusion of music. However, the “aim” of this process correlates with Furst’s observation: it is “negative” in effect, a destruction of illusion whose only purpose is to remind the listener of this illusion and to jest.

This highlights the second, and most important point: the areas where wit and humour overlap with Romantic irony relate only to certain aspects of the later concept. The presence and intervention of a self-conscious artist, together with the play and “breaking” of levels of aesthetic illusion are only one element of Schlegel’s conception of Romantic irony. Instances such as those considered above do not produce the crucial play of paradox – the constant alternation of creation and

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<sup>163</sup> Behler (1990) p. 63. Note that this process is itself almost ironic, since it is “entirely open-ended towards the future” – an infinite process of becoming, with no teleological goal (ibid. p. 63).

<sup>164</sup> Indeed Muecke argues that Romantic irony was rarely fully exemplified because it was difficult, if not impossible to produce an artwork that included all the attributes or facets of a concept so complex. He considers that that it is only in the novels of Thomas Mann that the concept of Romantic irony is fully exemplified (Muecke (1969) p. 185/186).

<sup>165</sup> Thus Bonds describes Haydn’s work in terms of the *origin* of musical irony. Indeed, he actually acknowledges a chronological distinction between the humour of Haydn and Jean Paul and Romantic irony (Bonds (1991) p. 67/68). Haydn’s humour and “irony” are not fundamentally Romantic in nature; nevertheless, they are an important forerunner of Beethoven’s Romantic irony, and indeed share some common elements.

destruction arising from Fichtean reflection – that was central to Schlegel's conception; rather, they produce the effects of proto-romantic irony.

It is the absence of this infinite process that most clearly distinguishes such instances from Romantic irony. Although the satirical elements and “proto-romantic” devices in certain cases of musical wit and humour do overlap with Romantic irony to an extent, such instances do not produce the infinite reflective paradoxes of Schlegel's conception. Rather, the “negative” direction of these instances is more closely related to the “stable” and “finite” irony considered by Booth. In “stable” irony “once a reconstruction of meaning has been made, the reader is not then invited to undermine it with further demolitions and reconstructions”.<sup>166</sup> Moreover, because of the finite quality of this stable irony “the reconstructed meanings are in some sense local, limited. Though some of them are about very broad subjects like religion or the nature of God, the field of discourse even in these is narrowly circumscribed”.<sup>167</sup> Crucially, Booth explicitly differentiates such ironies from “infinite” and “unstable” types – the type that includes both Romantic irony and the general, existential irony that will be considered below. In these cases

the only sure affirmation is that negation that begins all ironic play: “*this* affirmation must be rejected,” leaving the possibility, and in infinite ironies the clear implication, that since the universe (or at least the universe of discourse) is inherently absurd, all statements are subject to ironic undermining. No statement can really “mean what it says”.<sup>168</sup>

The wit, humour and even Proto-romantic irony in Haydn, Mozart (and in earlier works by Beethoven himself) is limited in scope, “finite” in effect and susceptible to stable reconstruction. This occurs particularly in instances of wit – its combinations and double-meanings are finite and local in effect, informing specific moments of

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<sup>166</sup> Booth (1974) p. 6

<sup>167</sup> Ibid. Booth adds, moreover, that “stable irony . . . does not mock our efforts by making general claims about the ironic universe, or the universe of human discourse. It does not say “There is no truth” or “All human statements can be undermined by the true ironic vision,” or . . . “we do not know anything” (ibid.).

<sup>168</sup> Ibid. p. 240/241 Booth makes the distinction between finite and infinite, stable and unstable ironies even clearer elsewhere: “stable irony . . . does not mock our efforts by making general claims about the ironic universe, or the universe of human discourse. It does not say “There is no truth” or “All human statements can be undermined by the true ironic vision,” or . . . “we do not know anything” (ibid. p. 6).

movements: musical puns are apprehended in a moment; witty combinations of topics remain specific to the context in which they occur. However, even in the examples of humour the “annihilation” that occurs is constrained in moments and momentary disruptions: they are finite and reconstructable, “jokes” whose meaning is perceived in retrospect, and whose annihilating effect is often integrated into the subsequent form of the music. The process of such instances is “negative” and finite in effect, gesturing towards aesthetic illusion, rather than producing the infinite, paradoxical motion of creation and destruction that characterises romantic irony. As such, even the “proto-romantic” effects or elements of these instances reflect the distinction that Schlegel himself makes between “rhetorical” irony that is circumscribed in moments of a work (i.e. “finite”) and works that are “pervaded” by irony.<sup>169</sup>

Significantly, this distinction can also be seen in the music of Beethoven. Longyear’s distinction between works that “contain not romantic irony, but a playfulness that stems from the Haydn of the finales of the string quartets Opus 33, No. 2, and Opus 76, no. 5 and Symphony 102”<sup>170</sup> highlights a developmental progression within Beethoven’s music: there are important examples of proto-Romantic irony in his work. Perhaps the most obvious example occurs with the juxtaposition of the (Burkian) sublime and the ridiculous in the finale of the Ninth Symphony, where the comedic “Turkish” music undercuts the high seriousness of the preceding choral section. This violent dislocation undermines the aesthetic “illusion” of the preceding music, demonstrating the intervention of a self-conscious authorial “voice”. The coda of the finale of the Op. 95 quartet produces a similar comic undercutting of preceding “serious” music:

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<sup>169</sup> Schlegel (1991) *Lyceum* fragment 42 p. 5/6. See the quotation in the second chapter of this work.

<sup>170</sup> Longyear (1970) p. 654 Note that Longyear refers primarily to earlier Beethoven for such humorous instances.



Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

123

poco ri - tardan - do

130

*pp* *ppp* *sempre piano*

*p* *pp* *ppp* *sempre piano*

*sempre pp* *sempre pp* *sempre pp* *sempre pp*

In both cases the establishment, and subsequent dislocation of an aesthetic illusion produces a concurrent shifting of discursive level that could be compared to Heine's "sting in the tail"<sup>171</sup> or Jean Paul's "hot baths of sentiment . . . followed by cold douches of irony".<sup>172</sup> Neither of these formulations, however, can be considered as Romantic irony, although both are often cited as an indication of its nature. Rather,

<sup>171</sup> See Dill (1989) p. 173

<sup>172</sup> Muecke (1969) p. 181

like the examples above, they are finite in effect and stable in reconstruction – they are “proto-romantic” in nature.

Nevertheless, these examples highlight a gradual transition or development of the irony that may be observed in Beethoven’s works. He was always prone to irony, wit and humour: consider the progression of his Haydnesque metrical play and abrupt interruptions and juxtapositions, through the parodies of Haydn in his Op. 18 quartets to the proto-romantic irony of the “Serious” quartet and the 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony. Crucially, however, the irony of Beethoven’s late works differs significantly both from the wit, humour and “irony” of the “Classical” style and from these earlier “Proto-romantic” instances. These works – in particular the Op. 132 quartet – produce a continual, infinite process of paradox, a constant alternation of creation and destruction that negates or annihilates *every* positive assertion. The disruptions in these works are unmitigated; they cannot be integrated into a “whole” conception or “meaning” of a work because they negate such a unified conception in an infinite process of ironic undermining. This, in turn lends the parabasis of these works a different quality to the momentary, “proto-romantic” authorial intrusions that the finite, limited effect of Haydn’s humorous annihilation or wit tend to produce. The continual process of Romantic irony produces a constant intrusion of the author’s ironic presence extending throughout the entire work – the continual parabasis that, in part, defines it. This difference is not simply a matter of degree. Rather it reflects the essential difference between the “finite” humour and wit of earlier examples and the movement towards the “infinite” that occurs in Schlegel’s Romantic irony. It is only in these later works that irony *pervades* the music; it is only here that the continual, infinite, paradoxical processes of Romantic irony proper are to be found.

# Beethoven's Romantic Irony: the String Quartet Op. 132

The A minor quartet Op. 132 is perhaps Beethoven's strangest creation, rivalled only by the quartet that followed it, the B flat quartet Op. 130. The severe disparity of its constituent elements has been considered in terms of fragmentation<sup>1</sup>, musical critique,<sup>2</sup> social commentary<sup>3</sup> and even of personal psychological journey.<sup>4</sup> In this chapter I will argue that, in addition to these interpretations, the extreme nature of this work can be considered as a correlative of Romantic irony. Its five movements are linked, not only thematically or topically but also by an irony that permeates them all, a continual alternation of assertion and negation, of artistic creation and destruction. The fragmentation of this work is caused by the frequent disruptive occurrences of parabasis – an “authorial” voice whose intrusive presence violates the artistic conventions of the music. The incongruity that this produces results in multiple levels of paradox and of ironic reversal, and in a continual process of objectification within and between the movements.

## First Movement

This movement might be considered as a microcosm of the entire quartet: the incongruity and irony that pervade this movement form the common denominator of the rest of the work. The movement presents a dazzling complex of incongruity on both the “surface” and the “deep” levels of the music. The “surface” of the music is riven with interruptions and juxtapositions, a constant authorial parabasis that produces a continual play of levels. The “deep” structure carries the movement into the realm of paradox and ironic reversal. It produces a continual dialectic of creation and destruction through its thematic process, and a disjunction between thematic and harmonic processes that distorts the form of the entire movement.

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<sup>1</sup> Adorno (1998) p. 125, p. 134

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 134, p. 190

<sup>3</sup> Chua (1995) p. 108-110

<sup>4</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 265

The two “levels” of this movement will be examined separately for the purposes of this analysis, whilst recognising this distinction as inherently unsound: such levels are inextricably linked, generating each other. Nevertheless, as with all music it is the “surface” of this movement with which the listener first engages, “deep” structures becoming apparent only retrospectively, frequently upon repeated study.<sup>5</sup>

## **“Surface” structures**

Throughout this movement there is a play of contrast that is perhaps the most extreme of all the quartets. The juxtapositions and interruptions of this movement produce a continual undermining and diversion of the thematic structure, resulting in an almost bewildering complex of topics, conventions and clichés. This fragmented “surface” forms a continual alternation of creation and destruction, involving not only the conventions of this movement, but of the Classical style in general. It presents a complicated play of levels, moving so far and so frequently that no one level is the “correct” one: all are problematic. This confusion of levels results in continual objectification, parabasis and paradox.

The contrast between the quiet, contrapuntal opening and the energetic cadenza in the first violin between bars 8 and 9 sets the tone for the rest of the movement. Although these bars represent an extreme change of topic this contrast is, nevertheless, ‘mediated’ and prepared by the crescendo and harmonic movement of the preceding bar.<sup>6</sup> This is significant because, particularly within the context of sonata forms, contrasts, even those of an extreme nature are to be expected

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<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that this point answers the potential criticism that may be levelled at any ironic interpretation of music – that the incongruities and reversals that are identified are not always perceived clearly in performance i.e. that the music doesn’t *sound* ironic. This may be partially due to the fact that performances can modify the effect of incongruities through temporal or dynamic “smoothing”: sudden contrasts or juxtapositions, for example, may be mediated and lessened by a performer’s interpretation of the score. However, it is the case that the types of incongruities and reversals that will be identified in Op. 132 require detailed examination of the score. Such close scrutiny reveals the fundamental paradoxes that underlie the irony of this work and accounts for the fragmented “surface” structure.

<sup>6</sup> The diminished harmony in bars 8 to 10 may be understood functionally as an extension of dominant harmony, resolving to the tonic (A minor) in bar 10.

stylistically. As will be considered more fully in the next chapter, incongruity (which is considered an indicator of irony) is defined not simply by contrast, but rather by the *context* in which the contrast occurs. Since contrast and conflict are stylistically expected elements of sonata form, most contrasts in such movements can be accommodated by the style. As a result not every contrast will be incongruous or ironic.

The descending Neapolitan arpeggios that begin in bars 18 and 28, however, are unmediated intrusions that halt the momentum generated in the preceding bars. In both cases these intrusions deflect the harmonic course of the music away from the subdominant (D minor). The first intrusion forces the music back to the tonic, combined with a juxtaposition of topics similar to that seen in the first ten bars: slow, largely homophonic motion is contrasted with the solo figuration of the violin.<sup>7</sup> The second Neapolitan intrusion pushes the harmonic course towards F minor (bars 30 – 33), a key that is remote from the main key of the movement. Although this is quickly “corrected” to F major in bar 35, the F minor passage underscores the disruptive effect of these Neapolitan intrusions. Nevertheless, since these dramatic intrusions are in keeping with the contrasts of the preceding bars, as well as of sonata form generally, at this point in the movement they could perhaps be reconciled to the surrounding bars: they are not really an incongruity.

Subsequently, however, there are unmediated juxtapositions that must be regarded as incongruous, intruding into the course of the music, interrupting and diverting it. The first of these occurs between bars 37 and 40. The accelerating effect of the move from triplets to semiquavers in bars 36 and 37 belies the underlying cadential motions. The sudden change of texture and topic in bar 38 – a cadential descending sequence – is unexpected in this context: it simply sounds like an intrusion. Moreover, the simple sequence and conventional cadential motion (particularly in the bass) sound too simple in this context. There is, in other words, an element of cliché, or banality to this brief section, which imparts a somewhat comedic air. As will be

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<sup>7</sup> Note that here this figuration actually occurs as E dominant seventh, clarifying the function of the earlier occurrence.



seen, momentary banalities such as these punctuate the music, producing fleeting juxtapositions of “comic” and “serious” that, in context, are significant: they are indicators of ironic function.

Example 4.1, Op. 132, 1st Movement  
Assai sostenuto.

The musical score is for the first movement of Op. 132, marked 'Assai sostenuto'. It is in 4/4 time and features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score is divided into three systems. The first system shows the initial measures, with dynamics marked *pp* (pianissimo) for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The second system continues the music, with dynamics marked *pp* and *cresc.* (crescendo) for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The third system is marked 'Allegro' and begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello, followed by a *dim.* (diminuendo) and then a *p* (piano) dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, slurs, and dynamic markings.

13

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*cresc.*

*cresc.*

*cresc.*

*cresc.*

Adagio. Allegro.

19

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*f*

*fp*

*p*

*f*

*fp*

*p*

*f*

*fp*

*p*

*p*

24

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*cresc.*

*f*

*cresc.*

*f*

*cresc.*

*f*

*cresc.*

*f*

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a string quartet, consisting of Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello (Vc.).

- System 1 (Measures 30-34):** The music begins in measure 30 with a forte (*f*) dynamic. In measure 34, the dynamic shifts to piano (*p*).
- System 2 (Measures 35-38):** This system shows a crescendo (*cresc.*) in all four parts, starting in measure 35 and reaching its peak in measure 38.
- System 3 (Measures 39-40):** The music begins in measure 39 with a forte (*f*) dynamic. In measure 40, the dynamic shifts to piano (*p*) and then to fortissimo (*fp*).

This banal sequence is abruptly cut off in bar 40, with the expected perfect cadence in F major being diverted and replaced with an imperfect cadence in D minor. This cadence halts the progress of the music entirely: the theme that follows is entirely new which, again in the context of the preceding interruptions and diversions, tends to give it an intrusive quality. This effect is compounded when the close contrapuntal development of this theme is itself suddenly diverted. This diversion is related to those seen above: once again, the subdominant is derailed by an agitated

figuration in all the parts (bars 44 to 47) that is clearly related rhythmically to the earlier Neapolitan arpeggios. The effect of this is that the new contrapuntal theme is entirely lost: it is subverted by a diversion.

This process continues in the remainder of this problematic exposition. In bars 44 to 47, for example, the strong bass line, ascending violin line, crescendo and cadential 6/4 harmony strongly suggest a climactic perfect cadence in F major. However, although this cadence does occur harmonically correctly it is effectively “undercut” by the sudden reduction from forte to piano, and from a full texture of all the parts in chordal motion to one single bass note. Above all however, the introduction of the lyrical, dance-like second subject initially sounds, in the context of the preceding thematic juxtapositions, like another change in thematic direction. Moreover, although this second subject is established for a relatively long time (8 bars), it also is diverted. Again, the expected perfect cadence in bar 56 doesn’t resolve – it is “undercut” by a solo C in the cello and by the introduction of new figuration in the first violin, which builds until the point where it overruns the theme (bars 60 – 62). Nevertheless, the F major tonality of this second subject area is the longest section of stable tonality in the exposition - in some ways it presents a more stable tonal centre than the fragmented A minor of the first subject.<sup>8</sup>

Example 4.2, Op. 132, 1st Movement

The musical score shows four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The score begins at bar 44. All four parts are playing a similar rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. A crescendo marking is present in each part, leading to a forte (f) dynamic. The Violin I part has a fermata at the end of the first measure. The Viola and Cello parts have a fermata at the end of the first measure. The Violin II part has a fermata at the end of the first measure.

<sup>8</sup> The relatively extensive F major of the second subject perhaps explains the earlier diversions from the subdominant: D minor is avoided in the first subject in order to produce greater contrast with the second subject. More importantly, the fact that the second subject area is more tonally stable than the first is itself significant. It produces a certain reversal of function that, in the context of the other ironic reversals in the movement, might be given an ironic interpretation.

Vln. I *p*

Vln. II *p dolce*

Vla. *non legato p*

Vc. *p non legato*

Vln. I *piu cresc. dim. teneramente*

Vln. II *cresc. dim. p*

Vla. *cresc. dim. p*

Vc. *cresc. dim. p*

Vln. I *dolce cresc. non legato*

Vln. II *dolce cresc. non legato*

Vla. *dolce cresc. non legato*

Vc. *dolce cresc. non legato*

Vln. I *ff p legato*

Vln. II *ff p legato*

Vla. *ff p legato*

Vc. *ff p legato*



The intrusions and diversions move in ever-tighter juxtapositions towards the conclusion of the exposition: the loud diminished arpeggios of bars 67 and 69 are juxtaposed with quiet resolutions. The strong harmonic motion of bar 73, which follows the introspection of the preceding three bars, is already somewhat incongruous: it sounds too simple and clear – another banality. This is compounded, however, when the expected cadence is undercut both by the rest at the beginning of bar 74 and by the resolution of the cadence onto an F dominant 7<sup>th</sup>. This final gesture produces a resolution that itself requires resolution – it is paradoxically both closural and non-closural simultaneously.

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There are several main elements of incongruity within this exposition. The first, and most basic of these is the continual, almost bewildering opposition of topics: in the first 11 bars a contrapuntal, “learned style” topic is juxtaposed with a violin cadenza (which Kerman calls a “scream”).<sup>9</sup> This cadenza is itself cut off prematurely, being replaced by a march theme, which is itself interrupted by the B flat fanfare.<sup>10</sup> The repetition of these juxtapositions, from bar 21, is even tighter, now including banal cadential sequences. The end of the first subject area (if such a fragmented structure can justifiably be called that) contains another opposition of contrapuntal and march topics, before being superseded by the lyrical, arioso-type second subject, a juxtaposition that Kerman considers a “drastic contrast”.<sup>11</sup> Even the cadential figure that closes the exposition must be considered a banal diversion from the expected cadence in bar 72.

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<sup>9</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 244

<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting that the antecedent phrase of the march theme itself is missing the strong downbeat characteristic of a march. The consequent phrase, in contrast, does possess strong down beats (for example, beats 1 and 3 of bar 15). It could be argued that the march theme is, therefore, flawed – it is both “march” and “non-march” at the same time.

<sup>11</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 245. Note that this second subject, like the first, contains an inherent incongruity. There is a basic opposition of duple and triple metres between the upper and lower parts. Basil Lam considers that the subjects “fragile identity is purely melodic, disturbed rather than supported by the strange restless accompaniment in broken triplets.” Lam (1975) *Beethoven String Quartets*, vol. 1 & 2 p. 87

The crucial element in this strange exposition, however, is not simply the contrast of topics, but rather the manner in which they succeed one another. These are not simply contrasts – rather they are incongruous juxtapositions, interruptions that change discursive levels, resulting not merely in the contrast, but rather in the opposition of topics. Every time that there is an assertion of a theme or topic it is almost immediately negated by diversion, a process repeated so frequently that it produces interruptions of interruptions and diversions that divert diversions. Moreover, the movement is punctuated by moments (such as bars 72/74) that Chua describes as “pure irrationality”, “a “gape in the garment,” a crack in the structure, a collapse of logic, creating a crisis to be employed as bliss.”<sup>12</sup> The combined effect is a bewildering array of themes and gestures that fragments the “surface” of the discourse.

This continual process may be understood in terms of irony. The intrusion of themes upon one another results in a process of parabasis: each interruption displays the presence of a seemingly destructive authorial manipulation, a wilful, self-conscious intrusion upon the conventions and aesthetic illusion of the individual themes and topics, and indeed of the music itself.<sup>13</sup> The moments of “irrationality” especially relate to this parabasis. The cracks and ruptures created by these moments destroy aesthetic illusion, objectifying and casting an ironic light on the conventions of music – conventions such as logic, continuity, structure and comprehensibility. The elements of parody – in the form of clichéd cadences and sequences – and the juxtapositions of “serious” and “comic” that often result add further layers to this objectification of musical convention.

Crucially, each of these intrusions may be understood as producing a shift in discursive level.<sup>14</sup> The sudden, unmediated juxtapositions produce an objectification of the preceding music – we suddenly change to a “higher” level, “above” the

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<sup>12</sup> Chua (1995) p. 88

<sup>13</sup> As considered above, whilst contrast and opposition is an expected part of sonata style, the manner in which the oppositions of topics occurs as well as the sheer number of interruptions is incongruous. In this circumstance the music moves beyond the accepted norms of sonata style, displaying the intrusive presence of an authorial “voice”.

<sup>14</sup> See Hatten (1994) p. 174 ff.

conventions of the previous material. However, the continual diversions and interruptions in this movement create a continual switching of discursive level, to the extent that, within a short time, we no longer know which is the “true” level of the music and which is the intrusion – we no longer know which elements are objectified and which are not, which are “victims” and which are not.<sup>15</sup> In this process, every assertion is negated; every element or aesthetic illusion created is subsequently destroyed. The constant parabasis produces a continual paradox of simultaneous creation and destruction, of simultaneous aesthetic reality and artifice – the constant Fichtean reflective motion of Romantic irony.

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The fragmentation of the surface of this movement continues throughout the development section. Due to this fragmentation the formal functions of this movement are somewhat obscured: the continuous changes of theme in the exposition ensure that the return of the opening four-note figure does not provide a certain structural landmark – it could simply be another thematic juxtaposition. The function of the violin cadenza in bar 119 is similarly uncertain. This function of these formal and structural landmarks is only clarified in retrospect. The manner in which the first theme develops in an apparently untroubled manner from bar 79 onwards, for example, highlights the structural function of the preceding four-note motif, confirming the beginning of the development. The only repeat of the violin cadenza acts similarly, signalling the beginning of the recapitulation

From a certain viewpoint the development section is quite conventional: the key scheme, for example, is rather conservative, the first theme being developed first in G minor and C minor (bars 79 to 91) and finally E minor (bars 107 to 118). Similarly, the thematic development is limited: the march theme retains its identity fully, although it occurs in clear counterpoint with the four-note motif for the first time in bars 111 to 114. This motif is itself transformed at bar 103, where it occurs

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<sup>15</sup> In this regard this movement bears comparison with the works of Tieck and Brentano – there is the same intrusive presence, the same complex of the destruction of discursive levels, the same fundamental uncertainty of the “true” level.

no longer in quiet counterpoint, but rather attains a new forte dynamic level and chordal movement.

Indeed, were it not for the landmine of bar 92 this development would be entirely unremarkable (a fact that will be considered below in relation to the “deep” structure of the movement). The cadential 6/4 harmony and strong chordal movement of bar 91 indicate clear cadential motion towards C minor. This cadence is, however, completely undercut by nearly three beats rest, following which an entirely new theme is introduced in C major. This combination of unexpected key, new theme and incongruous rest produces a frankly comical effect. Indeed Kerman describes this moment as “pure absurdity . . . a contradiction of everything experienced thus far”, and as a “nihilistic gesture . . . able to trivialize the whole first surge of the development and nullify its move from F to G to C minor”.<sup>16</sup> Chua picks up Kerman’s emphasis on absurdity: for him it is a fissure in the music – a moment of “aporia” – that brings the formal problems, the “madness” of the movement’s gestures to the foreground.<sup>17</sup>

Although this moment echoes throughout the “deep” structure of the movement, it is profoundly important to the “surface” structure. It represents perhaps the clearest instance of parabasis, one of the most extreme interruptions that introduces not only a contrasting theme but also a silence that is unprecedented in the movement. This moment doesn’t simply nullify the preceding music; it casts the whole movement in an ironic light. If the contrasts of the exposition could be related on some level, to the “normal” contrasts of sonata form, this interruption cannot: it simply destroys the aesthetic illusion of the movement, completely distorting and objectifying the formal function and structure of the development.

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<sup>16</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 243 and p. 247

<sup>17</sup> Chua (1995) p. 88 and 95/96

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

The development therefore continues, indeed intensifies the undermining of cadences, unexpected and incongruous juxtapositions and the introduction of new themes seen throughout the exposition. Indeed bar 92 is only the most obvious of the incongruities of the development – other interruptions and juxtapositions pervade the section. For example, just as the new theme from bar 92 is getting underway, another over-simple, hence incongruous sequence, constructed from dotted dance-type figuration, diverts it. Similarly, the repetition of the cadence-gesture from bar 91 in bar 102 is again diverted, this time by the transformation of the four-note motif.

Such undermining of cadences is not in itself particularly problematic: the conventional, quasi-rhetorical purpose of such devices, normally towards the end of a formal section or movement, is actually to prolong and strengthen cadential motion. However, in the context of this movement the frequency and number of these instances is problematic and incongruous – there are simply too many cadential diversions. The continual play of discursive “levels” that results contributes to the



alternation and undermining of themes, contributes, in other words, to the irony of this movement.

Like the development, the recapitulation appears conventional in approach, proceeding in more or less the correct manner with the same succession of themes and all of the interruptions, juxtapositions and diversions of the exposition repeated here.<sup>18</sup> This apparent conventionality means that on this level the recapitulation seems to mediate the difficulties of the movement. Whilst the interruptions and juxtapositions of the fragmented exposition could be treated as unexpected and surprising authorial manipulation – i.e. as parabasis – the incongruities of these devices are greatly reduced within the recapitulation, which has a powerful effect upon their “meaning”. Because of the repetition, the return of the interruptions and diversions of the exposition is expected – they have become a convention of the music, and have therefore largely lost their ability to surprise.

However, on another, deeper, level this recapitulation compounds the problems of the movement. Whilst this recapitulation is a “correct” repeat of the thematic structure of the exposition, on the harmonic level it is not – the tonic is nowhere to be seen. The first theme here appears in E minor; following the Neapolitan interruption in bars 128/129 it subsequently reappears in D minor – the subdominant so often avoided in the exposition. Finally, despite hints towards the tonic in bars 151 to 154, the recapitulation is dominated by the key of C major: the second subject appears in this key (bars 159 onwards), and, as in the exposition, forms the longest period of stable tonality, lasting until bar 189. The section therefore parallels the A minor – F major motion of the exposition with E minor – C major (the D minor section (bars 134 – 142) effectively acting as the supertonic of C).

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<sup>18</sup> As noted above, although the return of the violin cadenza in bar 119 sounds like another interruption or diversion – following the long inverted pedal on B and the cadential motion of bar 118, E minor is expected in bar 119 – the formal function becomes clear with the return of the first subject.

111

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

*f*

*dim.*

*pp*

*f*

*dim.*

*pp*

*f*

*dim.*

*p*

*pp*

*f*

*dim.*

*p*

*pp*

120

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*cresc.*

*f*

*dim.*

*p*

*cresc.*

*f*

*p*

*cresc.*

*f*

*p*

*cresc.*

*f*

*p*

*espress.*

*p*

*p*

*espress.*

The image displays a musical score for four instruments: Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The score covers measures 129 to 134. In measure 129, all instruments play a rising melodic line. In measure 130, the dynamics are marked *cresc.* and *f*. In measure 131, the dynamics are marked *f*. In measure 132, the dynamics are marked *p*. In measure 133, the dynamics are marked *p*. In measure 134, the dynamics are marked *p*. The violin parts have a cadenza-like figure in measure 129, which is then repeated in measure 134. The viola and cello parts have a similar figure in measure 134.

It may therefore be seen that the return of the violin cadenza in bar 119 actually indicated the beginning of a false recapitulation. The reversal of this function is a relatively conventional aspect of the Classical style. It objectifies conventional procedures, highlighting the illusory nature of apparently clear formal markers by misleading the expectations that these conventions arouse in the listener. As will be seen, however, this is no ordinary false recapitulation of the type seen in Haydn's "Surprise" Symphony. Rather, it introduces a deep paradox into the formal structure of this movement, a reversal of formal function that is ironic in purport.

The "real" recapitulation begins unostentatiously at bar 195. The cadences in bars 188 – 194 are actually more problematic than the earlier occurrence at the end of the exposition: they extend the metrical play and harmonic ambiguity. (The beat is "lost" between bars 189/190 and is only re-established in bar 195.) However, they also function as clear formal markers – a new formal section is expected.

The musical score is divided into three systems. The first system (measures 186-190) features a *ritardando* leading into a *cresc.* section, followed by a *p* (piano) section marked *a tempo*. The second system (measures 191-200) continues the *cresc.* and *p* sections. The third system (measures 201-210) shows a *cresc.* leading to a *f* (fortissimo) section. The instruments are Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4.

In harmonic terms this recapitulation is the “correct” one: both the first theme and the canonic theme (bar 214) occur in the tonic, whilst the second subject appears in the tonic major. Finally, the coda is firmly rooted back in to the minor mode. However, this second recapitulation is markedly different from both the exposition and the first recapitulation: although it is correct harmonically, it does not reprise the thematic structure accurately. It could be argued that this is because this second recapitulation seems to resolve, to some extent, the problems of the movement. Not

only are the harmonic contrasts between themes resolved, the interruptions and juxtapositions are greatly reduced – the Neapolitan interruptions, for example, have disappeared, whilst the canonic theme and second subject follow the first subject without the sense of interruption and juxtaposition that occurred in either the exposition or the first recapitulation. Even the conflict between the first theme and the four-note motif has been apparently mediated: the first subject area constitutes a more coherent unit where the two antithetical themes occur together in counterpoint, the four-note motif in retrograde acting as a *cantus firmus* to the main theme (bars 193 to 206). Chua likens this apparent thematic reconciliation to a dialectical synthesis, “elements that were opposed now illuminate each other – they are one and the same”.<sup>19</sup> Such a process would be similar to a conventional sonata form where, in the “traditional” definition, elements that are initially opposed are reconciled within the recapitulation, at least in harmonic terms.

However, the mediation and synthesis of this second recapitulation is only illusory. This may be seen, on the harmonic level, in the transformation of the second subject. The translation of the theme to the tonic major (bars 222 to 230) implies the possibility of a Picardy coda, a possibility eschewed, however, by the return to A minor (bars 231/232). Significantly, Lam describes this moment as “an effect of tragic irony”,<sup>20</sup> a statement that Kerman’s comments clarify: “What is heartbreaking here is the certainty that this vision cannot last, and that we are to be made to hear the last bar lapse back to the minor mode”.<sup>21</sup> What both commentators highlight is the improbability, indeed impropriety of this major version. The irony here arises from the comfort of our superior viewpoint as observers: we “know” that such a Picardy finish is impossible.

This, though, is secondary to a profound irony in the thematic structure of this recapitulation. According to Chua, the thematic synthesis sought throughout this movement is never attained:

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<sup>19</sup> Chua (1995) p. 86/87

<sup>20</sup> Lam (1975) p. 88

<sup>21</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 249



The closer the synthesis between these contrasts the greater the antagonism, since the ambivalent gestures are forced to coalesce; the temporal violence may be eliminated, but that merely generates an emotional violence in which the gathering of an ancient polyphony (*Adagio*) with the march (*Allegro*) compresses past and present, sacred and secular, into a disunified unity.<sup>22</sup>

I would suggest that this process therefore results in a deeply paradoxical situation: The more the music strains to synthesise and resolve its conflicts, the more this goal eludes it, producing instead only a tighter juxtaposition and a greater antagonism. This results in a sort of “spiral” motion, a continual movement of simultaneous attraction and repulsion, assertion and negation, in other words a continual ironic motion.

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The ironies of this recapitulation differ from the processes seen in the exposition and development: the interruptions and parabasis effects of the exposition and development are mediated, at least on a surface level, by the two recapitulations.<sup>23</sup> However, the play of discursive levels and intrusive parabasis is fully reinstated by the coda. This is achieved, again, largely through cadential deflection and avoidance of closure. Following the elaboration of the first theme (centred strongly on the tonic) the diverted cadence in bar 241 appears to prolong the closure implied by both the dominant pedal in bars 237/238 and the repeated cadence-like motion in bars 239 and 240. The expected cadence in bar 243 is, however, avoided again, this time by diminished harmony. This movement is repeated again in bars 244/5, the melodic line sinking ever lower in its search for resolution.

The sudden register shift in bar 246 seems designed to counterbalance this descent, strengthening the implication of, and need for cadential closure. However, this is undermined once more by an interrupted cadence and by a sudden reduction of texture to only two voices. This leads to a final attempt at closure: bars 250 to 253 outline a full 8 – 2 descent, strongly suggesting a final resolution to 1, whilst the

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<sup>22</sup> Chua (1995) p. 87

<sup>23</sup> However, as will be seen below the irony in the recapitulations arises from different sources, including particularly the relationship between the two recapitulations.

diminuendo to a pianissimo dynamic level suggests a different approach to ending the movement – sinking to the dynamic level of the opening bars.

Example 4.6, Op. 132, 1st Movement

[illegible]

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*f* *piu f*

*f* *piu f*

*f* *piu f*

*f* *piu f*

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*ff* *p* *pp* *sempre*

*ff* *p* *pp* *sempre*

*ff* *p* *pp* *sempre*

*ff* *p* *pp* *sempre*

*ff* *p* *pp* *sempre*

250 *morendo*

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*pp* *sempre pp*

*pp* *pp*

*pp* *sempre pp*

*pp* *sempre pp*

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*cresc.* *f* *sf*

*cresc.* *f* *sf*

*cresc.* *f* *sf*

*cresc.* *f*

The image shows a musical score for four instruments: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The score is written in a key with one sharp (F#) and common time. Violin I has a melodic line with trills. Violin II and Viola have chords, with 'sf' (sforzando) markings. Violoncello has a bass line with descending octaves. The music is in a key with one sharp (F#) and ends with a final cadence.

This attempt at closure, like those preceding it, is again deflected – the dominant 7<sup>th</sup> harmony continues over into bar 254. However, in contrast to the earlier instances where the basic topic and melodic movement are extended rather than interrupted, the sudden, unexpected change of topic at bar 254 is entirely incongruous. Beethoven introduces a dramatic, almost operatic codetta here: the trills, low dynamic level and tense harmony clearly imply a dramatic effect; the sudden rise in dynamic level and powerful unison chords from bar 258 confirm this topic. Finally, the music achieves the long-delayed closure with the strong repeated cadences of bars 262 to 264.

There are several levels of incongruity surrounding this coda. Firstly, there is a dislocation of the harmonic and thematic levels. Although the final codetta section is, on a purely harmonic level, a perfectly satisfactory, conventional closure the juxtaposition of topics at bar 254 means that the thematic level of the music is incongruous, producing a disconnection between thematic and harmonic levels. This incongruity, however, is compounded by the more important fact that the operatic codetta has about it a distinctly parodic air. There is an element of exaggeration surrounding the elements of this final topic – the trills sound too obviously “dramatic” in intent; similarly the assertiveness of the chords from bar 258 simply sounds overblown (the obvious conventionality of the descending octaves in the bass in particular produces this effect). This exaggerated feeling, however, is mostly due to the trans-contextualisation of this topic. An operatic, dramatic ending is out of context, both in terms of the genre (such obviously operatic music is out of place in a

quartet) and in terms of the movement itself. This is particularly noticeable given the fact that this codetta arises as a very abrupt change of topic. Such juxtapositions of topic tend to produce objectification – the conventions of the incongruous element will simply sound unconvincing. Moreover, the effect of this juxtaposition is heightened by the fact that it follows the fifth attempt at satisfactory harmonic and melodic resolution in the coda. Whilst some delay of closure might be expected in a coda in order to produce a more convincing ending, the extent of this process in this coda must be considered an exaggeration of conventional techniques: the fact that every attempt at closure is deflected simply produces too much delay.

The combination of this too-great cadential delay with the juxtaposition of topics and parodic nature of the codetta produces a particularly great incongruity, a particularly noticeable parabasis. In this closing parody of a dramatic, “rescue opera” close there is more bathos than pathos, more melodrama than drama. Although this might be taken as ridiculing or commenting ironically upon the dramatic, operatic basis of sonata form generally, within this movement it fulfils a more specific purpose. It produces a final objectification of the music’s conventions, a final destruction of illusion. The fact that the final harmonic resolution, so long delayed, comes in an entirely inappropriate manner adds greatly to the incongruity – it is closure of a sort, but it is deeply unsatisfactory. This final twist is a last undermining of the preceding structure, a moment of parabasis that continues the alternation of creation and destruction that has dominated the movement.

### **“Deep” structure**

The disjunctions, parabasis and irony seen on the surface levels of the music are also reflected in the deep structures. Indeed, these more fundamental levels actually produce profound paradoxes that underpin and even generate the irony of the music’s surface. These deep levels produce a complex of irony and paradox, generated from disparate elements – from unity and disunity, from synthesis, chaos and absurdity.



The first of these “deep” paradoxes arises from the disjunction between the harmonic and thematic structures of the movement that has already been briefly mentioned. Throughout the movement these fundamental elements do not coincide, thereby creating an almost tectonic tension that affects both the surface and the overall form in significant ways. This disjunction is first seen in bar 10 at the end of the solo violin cadenza. This cadenza outlines an extended dominant seventh on E, underlining the A minor of the opening bars. The resolution of this dominant chord, however, comes one beat too early: although the descending 6-5 in the violin suggests that the resolution should occur on the first beat of bar 11, it actually occurs on the final beat of bar 10. This produces a striking, though momentary, disjunction between harmonic and thematic structures.<sup>24</sup>

The problems of this cadence are reflected throughout the movement. As seen there is a prevalence of cadence avoidance throughout this movement: whilst the harmonic structure always pushes towards closure, the interruptions and intrusions of new themes continually avoid it. Even in the places where conventional cadences do occur, there is frequently a disjunction in that, whilst the resolution occurs technically correctly, there is an incongruous juxtaposition of themes or topics at the moment of resolution.<sup>25</sup>

These disjunctions, however, function as secondary, “surface” indicators of a more fundamental occurrence: the striking dislocation between harmonic and thematic structures that occurs within the two recapitulations. As seen, although the first recapitulation is an accurate repeat of the thematic structure of the exposition it occurs in the wrong keys. However, although it must therefore be considered a false recapitulation it is no mere Haydnesque joke: as a false recapitulation it goes on for too long – it is almost exactly the same length as the exposition (minus the eight

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<sup>24</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that in the first recapitulation this momentary disjunction is actually corrected. In bar 120 a dominant seventh on B occurs, essentially the same harmony outlined by the violin cadenza (the diminished harmony of the cadenza functioning as a dominant minor 9<sup>th</sup> chord without the root).

<sup>25</sup> See again the transition between first and second subjects in bars 47 and 48 and the sudden diversion in bars 72 and 73. Even the extreme rupture at bar 92 in the development actually resolves correctly in harmonic terms, albeit with a change of mode.

introductory bars), and it is actually longer than the real recapitulation that follows it.<sup>26</sup>

It could perhaps be argued that, due to the fragmentation of the tonality in the exposition, the “falseness” of the first recapitulation is not readily apparent to the listener. Nevertheless, the presence of the second recapitulation clarifies the function of this first recapitulation, and exposes the paradoxes of this formal device. As seen, the second recapitulation must, in terms of the harmonic structure, be considered the “real” recapitulation, since each thematic area occurs in the correct key. Despite the “correct” return of the harmonic structure, however, this second recapitulation does not reprise the thematic structure correctly; indeed it further antagonises the opposition between themes. As a result, in some ways the real recapitulation doesn’t sound as convincing or extensive as the false one.

What occurs then, is an expansion of the disjunction between the harmonic and thematic structures of the movement – the harmonic and thematic structures of the movement do not coincide at a fundamental level. This expansion results in two different recapitulations, two different reiterative strategies, with the first return as the “correct” recapitulation of the thematic structure and the second the “correct” resolution of the harmonic structure. This disjunction and duality therefore results in a fundamental paradox of simultaneous contradictory functions: the first recapitulation is at once a “false” return and a real one, the second recapitulation simultaneously correct and untrue.<sup>27</sup> This paradox produces a profound irony at the heart of this movement, a continual reversal of function.

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<sup>26</sup> Indeed this “false” recapitulation also more accurately recapitulates the thematic level of the exposition i.e. the order/succession of themes, the part-writing etc.

<sup>27</sup> It is worth noting that an anomaly in the harmonic course of the first recapitulation – the extensive second-subject area in C major – extends this irony. In the exposition the second subject appeared in the submediant (F major) in place of the more expected, conventional relative major (C major). The submediant second subject in the exposition could therefore be considered unusual. (Although too much could be made of this, it is telling that it is often F that replaces A in the cadence diversions that are so prominent a part of this movement.) In this “false” recapitulation the second subject occurs in the relative major. Thus, from a certain point of view, the “false recapitulation” is more “correct” than the exposition: the second subject here appears in the conventional key of a ‘normal’ exposition. This could be considered to produce a further element of paradox in this false recapitulation – it is both “wrong” and “correct” at the same time. If so, then this paradox is, in itself, enough to establish an unusually ironic purport for this false recapitulation.

Although the first recapitulation is, as stated, fundamentally different from the conventional false recapitulation of the Classical style, there is nevertheless an important relationship between the recapitulations of this movement and the conventional model. This relationship can be considered ironic: the extent of the “false” recapitulation is an ironic exaggeration of the conventional, Haydnesque use of such a device. This recapitulation references, almost by default, such conventional devices. More importantly, it objectifies the expectations aroused by this convention, as well as the artifice of the convention itself. Indeed, even if the first recapitulation is considered simply as an extension of the Haydnesque technique it is still incongruous. The expansion extends to the point where the false recapitulation actually provides an alternative to the real one. This adds a secondary level of objectification to the paradox produced by the two recapitulations.

The paradoxical reversal of function involved in the recapitulation is also seen in the development. As Kerman states, in this section “a curiously unimpressive and fitful passage ensues, more a deflection from the problems of the exposition than an engagement with them . . . there is no strong progress and no clear outcome”.<sup>28</sup> The development is paradoxical in that it really goes nowhere – it is a development that doesn’t develop. Thus the ironic reversal of function seen in the exposition – the paradox of simultaneous opposite meanings – actually pervades not only the exposition, but also the entire formal structure of this movement.

This reversal in the development, though, is related to the profound effect that the presence of two recapitulations has upon the overall form of the movement. The process of recapitulation in this movement dwarfs the exposition and development – the 113 bars of recapitulation almost exactly balance the 118 bars of the combined exposition and development. By the time that the coda is added (itself almost as long as the development), the unconventional recapitulatory structure of this movement has become its dominant structural feature.

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<sup>28</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 247

This situation, though, arises largely because of the truncated dimensions of the development: it is only forty-three bars long (bars 75 to 118). On first hearing the brevity of this development section could suggest a particularly terse sonata form, perhaps similar to the compact first movement of Op. 95. However, in hindsight the development section is simply too short, given the overall dimensions of the movement. In fact the odd proportions of this section are due to the recapitulatory structure. The first recapitulation actually interrupts the development – it simply arrives too early, severely shortening the development. This reading is confirmed by the fact that as noted above, the cadenza in bar 119 arrives entirely unexpectedly, both thematically and harmonically, interrupting whilst the development is in the process of the first combination of the main theme and the four-note motif (bars 111 – 118). The first recapitulation, in other words, functions as an intrusion.

The significance of this interruption of the development extends to the most fundamental structural level. In diverting the formal course away from the development into repetition the first recapitulation shifts the “surface” processes of interruption and juxtapositions into the deep structures of the movement. This results in a parabasis on the level of formal sections, not simply surface disjunctions – it is an intrusion into, and destruction of, the conventions of sonata form.

Thus the two recapitulations, arising out of the disjunction of harmonic and thematic levels, affect the overall form of the movement significantly, distorting its structure, and producing paradoxes and formal reversals. This process, in itself, however, produces a paradoxical dual function. On the “surface” level of the music the reiteration that occurs through these recapitulations actually serves to mediate the incongruity caused by the juxtapositions, interruptions and parabasis – these devices have lost their power to disrupt. However, although these two recapitulations mediate the surface incongruities, they replace them with even more problematic “deeper” incongruities – the structural disjunctions and ironic reversals of function described. These two recapitulations are therefore, paradoxically, both curative and ruinous, the solution to one set of incongruities and the source of others.

The final “deep” paradox within the structure of this movement concerns the manner in which the thematic structure of the movement relates to the formal structure. Firstly, it is striking that themes that, on the surface level of the discourse, interrupt and oppose one another, are actually derived from the march-like first subject. As may be seen, the lyrical curve of the second subject follows, in retrograde, the line of the first theme. The canonic theme from bar 40 is less directly related: it may be related either to the end of the first phrase or to the line of the second. In either case the appoggiatura figure at the end is the clearest “surface” link. Even the contrasting theme introduced after bar 92 is related, as an inversion of the second phrase, as well as through the march rhythm and falling appoggiatura.<sup>29</sup>

The image contains three pairs of musical staves. The first pair shows the '1st Theme' and '2nd Theme'. The second pair shows the '1st Theme' and a 'Contrapuntal' theme at bar 40, with lines connecting notes between the two staves. The third pair shows the '1st theme, 2nd phrase' and 'Bar 92', also with connecting lines. The notation is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#).

Other associations may be made between this theme and gestures within the movement. The figuration of the violin cadenza, for example, occurs in inversion, in the F minor version of the theme in bar 30:

<sup>29</sup> It is also worth observing that the falling appoggiatura at the end of both the canonic theme and the intrusive thematic fragment at bar 92 provides a link to both the main theme and the four-note motif. Indeed, this figure also links the main theme and the motif: appoggiaturas occur at the end of both the antecedent and consequent phrases of the march theme.





Similarly, the march element of the theme provides a more indirect link to some of the gestures – the Neapolitan interruptions and the figures in bars 44-47, for example, clearly relate rhythmically to the theme.

There is a sense in which the relationships between the themes of this movement produce a paradox. The fact that most of the themes and gestures may be related to the march theme means that the interruptions, juxtapositions and dislocations that occur really amount to one theme interrupting or violating different versions of itself. This therefore produces a paradox of simultaneous similarity and difference; the themes are at once opposed yet are one in substance. Such a paradox will, by its nature, produce an ironic interpretation.

This thematic inter-relatedness, and the paradox it creates, however, are superseded by the labyrinth of connections that may be forged from the four-note motif from the opening bars. Kerman's observation that the harmonic course of the movement is related to the opening four-note motif is perhaps the most fundamental: the overall tonal plan of the movement outlines the basic pattern of this motif, the tonal blocks of A minor, F major and E minor following the line of the motif:<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Note that the initial G sharp of the motif would have to be considered to be implied, perhaps within the extended dominant function of the first eleven bars. Moreover, the C major second subject in the first recapitulation really needs to be ignored if the tonal plan is to be considered a true expansion of the motif. (The long A minor recapitulation would naturally be a necessity for tonal closure, thus taking precedence over motivic replication.) Nevertheless, the "curve" of the harmonic course does bear a close resemblance to the motif, even though, from another viewpoint, it can be considered to really only outline the tonic-dominant relationship that is the conventional fulcrum of tonal music.

4-note Motif



Harmonic structure



Exposition  
b1 - 75

Development  
b76 - 102

1st Recapitulation  
b103 - 194

2nd Recap  
i I i

Coda

Chua's extensive analysis of this movement expands Kerman's observation considerably. He demonstrates that this motif dominates not only the harmonic structure but also much of the thematic structure of the movement, being present throughout the contrasts and juxtapositions of themes and motifs.<sup>31</sup>



A B C

C A B

C B A A

These examples are only a few of the many that may be found throughout this movement. It is no exaggeration to state that the all-pervading nature of the four-note motif means that it underpins the whole thematic and harmonic structure of the movement.<sup>32</sup> The fact that this motif is stated so baldly at the beginning of the movement seems designed to foreground the complex of thematic associations.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Chua (1995) p58-66

<sup>32</sup> The case for the predominance of this motif can be overemphasised. In constructing it from two of the most basic musical gestures – the semitone appoggiatura, either ascending or descending, and a fifth-relationship – Beethoven ensures that this motif will resonate, on an almost subconscious level,

The manner in which this motif dominates the movement, however, leads to profound paradox and irony. On one level the movement is dominated to a greater extent than any other single movement by Beethoven by rationality – the expansion of two motifs to fill the entire structure. However, there is conflict between this deep thematic interconnectedness and the fragmented surface structures, a disjunction that Chua describes as a “slippage between gesture and structure”.<sup>33</sup> He adds, “The expressive gestures in the work make little sense. Created by contrast and juxtaposition, this chaotic expressivity is primarily responsible for communicating the absurdity of the movement”.<sup>34</sup> Thus there is a fundamental opposition between the rational unity created by the all-pervading motif and the absurdity and irrationality of the surface, gestural structure.

There is therefore, within this movement a paradoxical state – a constant alternation between unity and disunity. Chua, however, considers that this fundamental opposition actually results from the thematic processes in this movement:

The absurdities of the expressive extremes, the abnormality of the form, the tensions, the contrasts, the juxtapositions, everything that creates chaos is actually complicit in, if not a function of, a rationality that has overstepped itself. The motif is manipulated into a contradiction, imposing an order that disorders itself and creates an internal fissure . . . the idea of motivic cohesion, intensified by variation and counterpoint, turns inside out, revealing how its very opposite – incoherence – secretly inheres within it.<sup>35</sup>

I would suggest, that this notion of a rationality that contains irrationality within itself relates this movement to a fundamental irony – the paradox of Fichtean reflection. The idea of a motif that so dominates a work that it destroys it may be considered a correlative of the reflective process of the subjective ego. In Fichte’s

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throughout the movement. Virtually every time an *appoggiatura* occurs, the motif may be invoked; every structural descent will tend to echo its “sighing” motion. Similarly the ubiquitous tonic-dominant motion it outlines underpins not only this movement but, on the broadest scale, also the entire “Classical” style. Because of this overly generic construction it is possible for the analyst to relate almost every bar of this movement to the motif, at some level. However, this begs the question of whether every descending semitone or tonic-dominant relationship is related to the motif, or whether they are simply the building blocks of tonal music: if a motif is present everywhere, is it truly a motif? Beethoven, in other words, exploits the inherent properties of music to produce the most widespread association possible.

<sup>33</sup> Chua (1995) p. 87

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p. 103

system everything is the result of subjectivity, being generated by the self-positing ego. The subjective ego, however, defines and delimits itself by its reflective process, thereby producing a continual alternation of self-creation and self-limitation or self-destruction. In creating a movement that at its deepest level simultaneously creates and destroys itself, Beethoven produces a correlative of the Fichtean process, a reflective movement of pure subjectivity. Moreover, this fundamental alternation of creation and destruction, producing infinite, mirror-like reflections is the very paradoxical motion that forms the basis of Schlegel's irony. At its heart, therefore, this movement displays the nature of Romantic irony.

The irony of the thematic process of this movement, though, extends yet further. The extensive thematic relationships may be considered an exaggeration of the inter-relationships that were the pinnacle of the "Classical" style. In "normal" occurrences this produces a web of interconnected themes, where one or two themes generate the structure, giving it coherence and unity. In this movement, however, this process is extended so that virtually all the material is related to two basic themes, a process that, as seen, leads not to coherence, but to chaos. The exaggeration of this stylistic convention to the point of breakdown in this movement is therefore an absurd violation of the very conventions that generated this technique. Moreover, this exaggeration relates the "deep" structure of the movement to the fragmented surface: each has its elements of exaggeration and "absurdity", which therefore permeate the whole.

More importantly, however, this exaggeration is also a self-referential act. The epitome of the thematic process of the Classical style was Beethoven's own music – it was this very technique that Hoffmann and others so praised in the works of the "heroic" middle period. The exaggeration of this technique to the point of breakdown could therefore be considered an ironic objectification of Beethoven's own practices. In this movement Beethoven effectively objectifies and destroys even his own vaunted thematic technique, pushing it to the point of absurdity.

This self-reflexive exaggeration of thematic inter-relationships is important with regard to the ironic interpretation offered here. Self-reflexivity is one of the key elements of Schlegel's irony, an indication of self-consciousness and artistic parabasis. Crucially, it is of central importance to this quartet – not least in the superscript of the middle movement, but also, as will be seen, in the irony of the second movement. Its occurrence in this movement compounds the ironies and paradoxes seen throughout, the ironic reversal of the formal functions, the disjunction between thematic and harmonic levels, the continual destruction of illusion and objectification of musical conventions, and the permanent parabasis seen on the “surface” levels. At the deepest levels of the music the continual movement between self-assertion and self-negation produces an infinite irony – a Fichtean reflection. Indeed, the entire structure of this movement – every different level – correlates with the elements that constitute Schlegelian Romantic irony. It is a multifaceted complex of discursive levels and paradox, more thoroughly ironic and self-conscious than any work by Tieck, Brentano or even Schlegel himself.

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## Second Movement

The ironic processes seen in this first movement continue throughout the remaining four movements; indeed these movements form, from a certain viewpoint, an expansion of the problems of this movement. The irony that pervades this opening movement becomes a continual process throughout, a connective thread weaving through the movements. It is seen not so much in the musical substance – in thematic and sub-thematic relationships, for example – but rather in the process and effect of each movement and in their interaction.

This may be seen in the second movement, which is, at once, both closely linked to and fundamentally opposed to the first movement. It continues the processes of the preceding movement, sharing many of its incongruous elements: it has a problematic harmonic structure; it is self-reflexive; there are banalities, clichés and parodic exaggerations; there are issues of cadence avoidance. Moreover, the striking instances of intrusive, destructive parabasis in this movement produce the same kind



of fragmented musical “surface”, the only difference being the relative sizes of the “fragments”.

However, as Kerman highlights, the contrast between these two movements is extreme – it is “complete and almost malicious”.<sup>36</sup> The play of metre that is almost continuous throughout, for example, relates this movement more to the “Classical” traditions Beethoven inherited, rather than to the more overtly “Romantic” language of the first movement.<sup>37</sup> (As will be seen, though, this “Classicism” is only a thin veneer, whose artifice is totally destroyed by ironic objectification.) Indeed, in place of the extreme expressivity and fragmentation of the first movement, this one is nonchalant, playful and frankly comical. This opposition will draw obvious parallels with the relationship between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> movements: in both cases an ultra-serious movement is immediately followed by a comic dance movement that seems to mock the apparent gravity that precedes it. However, despite this apparent opposition these movements are inextricably linked by the common presence of an all-pervasive irony, a continual authorial manipulation and objectification.

## Second Movement

The three fundamental incongruities that dominate this movement relate to the most basic of musical elements: metrical play and disjunction, and problematic harmonic and thematic structures. The most obvious harmonic issue in this minuet is its harmonic course: it comprises “blocks” of tonality that are strikingly juxtaposed, placed in unmediated contrast with each other. Although the first 22 bars of this section are a thoroughly conventional movement from tonic to dominant, the stark contrast of E major and C major that follows the repeat is novel, the sudden tonal juxtaposition, and the remoteness of the new key producing a particularly striking contrast.

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<sup>36</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 251

<sup>37</sup> Indeed both Kerman and Lam relate this movement to Mozart. Lam describes it as a “ghost of a Mozartian *menuetto*” (Lam (1975) p. 89), whilst Kerman clarifies the relationship, considering that “its grace, workmanship, and something about its humour – so purely professional and strange and inward – would surely have struck a responsive note [with Mozart]” (Kerman (1967) p. 253).

Ex. 4.7, Op. 132, 2nd Movement

Allegro ma non tanto

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

*p*

10

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*p*

*pp*

*pp*

*pp*

20

*cresc.*

*cresc.*

*cresc.*

*cresc.*

1.

2.

*f*

*p*

*f*

*f*

*f*

*p*

*f*

*p*

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

30

Similarly, the return to the tonic from bar 67 (via a simple change of mode from A minor) produces another blatant tonal contrast with the stable C major of the central section of the minuet. The unexpected repeat of this C major section at the end of the second A major section, however is perhaps the strangest, producing a juxtaposition that is, if anything, even wilder than the first. The transition is here extended by two bars, using A minor as a mediating point. This produces six bars of unwieldy tonal motion that foregrounds the striking tonal movement, maximising the contrast of C major with the final tonic of the cadence in bar 99.

Ex. 4.8, Op. 132, 2nd Movement

91

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

*cresc.*

*p*

*cresc.*

*cresc.*

*p*

*cresc.*

*cresc.*

*p*

*cresc.*

The image displays a musical score for a string quartet, consisting of four staves: Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The score is divided into two systems. The first system begins with a first ending bracket labeled '1.' and features dynamics of *f* (forte) and *p* (piano). The second system begins with a second ending bracket labeled '2.' and includes a tempo marking of 100. Dynamics in the second system include *pp* (pianissimo). The key signature for the entire piece is one sharp (F#).

The ungainly ascending gesture that links these two juxtaposed blocks of tonality (A major and C major) first occurs in the opening of the movement. Its sequential function, which outlines the leading note, tonic and submediant in A, D, B and E majors, allows no clear sense of tonality; when the theme finally enters there is some tonal ambiguity – one is not entirely certain of the key. Coming at the beginning of a movement this process, which might be termed a “becoming” process, a search for both the tonic and the theme, is unusual. The prominent use of this figure at the juxtapositions of tonal areas in this movement might therefore be taken as an expansion of the problematic opening of the movement, an unfolding from four bars to an entire section.

This opening gesture, however, also introduces the metrical issues that bedevil this minuet. It is used to harmonise the minuet theme, and the leading tone – tonic motion places harmonic stress upon the second beat of the bar, by constantly

“resolving” onto that beat.<sup>38</sup> This stress weakens the first beat, creating an almost syncopated effect: the first note of the theme could be considered to occur on beat 3. There is therefore a hint of a metrical ambiguity or duality within the first theme, an uncertainty regarding where the main beat falls.

Like the tonal issues this metrical irregularity extends throughout the minuet. Indeed the dominance of these issues over the rest of the movement can be considered an expansion of the basic characteristics of this theme. Both the metrical and tonal dualities that create problems in the movement are seen clearly in the first twenty-two bars, *within* the theme itself, combining to produce subtle incongruities. This is seen most clearly in the cadence in bar 22. The repeat of the last five notes of the theme from bar 18 stresses the second-beat resolutions. The repetition of this over these bars – a hemiola-like device – forces open the metrical duality of the theme, undermining the metre, so that the cadence in bar 22 resolves on the second beat of the bar, which sounds, however, as though it occurs on the first beat of the bar.<sup>39</sup>

Such rhythmic disturbances occur throughout the remainder of the minuet. The C major section essentially fulfils a development process, containing, for example, imitative, stretto-like entries of the theme (bars 27 to 32) and striking combinations of the first bar, its inversion and the second bar simultaneously (bars 45 to 50).

Nevertheless, cross-rhythms, rhythmic play and momentary hemiola effects, caused primarily by the inherent rhythmic uncertainty of the theme itself (particularly through the repetition of the quaver motion) continue throughout the section. Most obvious is the deflection of the perfect cadence in F major in bar 41 (suggested by the cadential bass motion in the preceding bars) by a hemiola figure derived from the

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<sup>38</sup> I do refer to the material of bars 5 and 6 as a theme, rather than what it actually is: no more than a thematic fragment. The significance of the manner in which this small fragment dominates the “Scherzo”, and the incongruity caused by its inability to resolve will be considered below.

<sup>39</sup> These hemiola bars also disrupt the periodicity of the phrases: even without the four bar “intro”, the consequent phrase is two bars too long. The melodic movement to G# instead of the more-expected B in bar 17 begins this process by repeating, rather than answering, bar 13. This forces an extension of the phrase by the hemiola gestures, thereby producing the disruption of both metre and phrasing.



second bar of the theme, which follows a circle of fifths motion back towards C major.

Ex. 4.9, Op. 132, 2nd Movement

The musical score is for the 2nd movement of Ex. 4.9, Op. 132. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system covers measures 39 to 44, and the second system covers measures 45 to 48. The instruments are Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The first system starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The second system starts with a piano (*pp*) dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Violin I  
Violin II  
Viola  
Cello

39  
45

*f*  
*f*  
*f*  
*f*

*pp*  
*pp*  
*pp*  
*pp*

Vln. I  
Vln. II  
Vla.  
Vc.

*cresc.*  
*cresc.*  
*cresc.*  
*cresc.*

Similar rhythmic “blurring” occurs at the return to the tonic in bars 68 to 71. The repetition of the descending quaver motion of the theme (bar 54 onwards) obscures the beat, effectively moving it from the first to the third beat. In bar 69 the hemiola figure is used to foreshorten the metre, which conflicts with the “felt” metre of the preceding fifteen bars. This produces a “limping” effect that undermines the rhythm of the thematic return in bar 71:



invasive quality of parabasis.<sup>40</sup> The metrical play in this movement also suggests such ironic intervention – the rhythmic manipulations that upset the minuet and, as will be seen, the trio, are clearly due to the intervention of an intrusive compositional presence.<sup>41</sup>

However, both these elements produce a secondary irony. The type of metrical play seen in this movement is clearly related to that of the “Haydn minuet”. Together with the obvious allusion to the “classical” style this produces a relationship with previous conventions. This relationship however is itself ironic. This irony centres on the nature of the minuet “theme”, which consists of only a two-bar fragment, “developed” through repetition in different tonal situations. This fragment, though, is actually only an antecedent phrase, which produces closural problems: lacking a consequent phrase, closure is possible only by repetition of the feminine cadence figure of the second bar. This closural problem of ending on a weak beat is compounded by the manner in which the harmony continually ascends by a fourth. This produces a continual need for strong resolution, a motion that is constantly denied.<sup>42</sup> In itself, this theme is therefore somewhat incongruous – it is really only half a theme, an open-ended fragment that, unable to complete itself, can only repeat its final few notes.

This basic characteristic leads, however, to a greater incongruity. The manner in which this one thematic fragment dominates the minuet, which dwells on it to an almost obsessive degree, is also deeply incongruous: the first 119 bars of the movement (plus repeats) comprise virtually nothing but this theme.<sup>43</sup> The extreme nature of this repetition produces an exaggeration of the “normal” repetition required

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<sup>40</sup> It could be perhaps argued that the strange tonal contrasts in the movement are really only a particularly striking third-relationship, a development of previous conventions lending interest to a minuet that is otherwise seemingly conventional. The manner in which this occurs however – the obviously intrusive quality of the juxtapositions – precludes such explaining away of the incongruity.

<sup>41</sup> Indeed, Chua considers that the rhythmic manipulations of this movement (and the fourth) produce an ironic social critique: the undermining of the various dances mocking the nobility, the peasantry and the military in turn. (Chua (1995) p. 126 and 129)

<sup>42</sup> As seen above, where perfect cadences do occur, they tend to fall on weak beats, for example in bars 22 and 99. In other instances where strong resolution seems likely, for example bar 41, it is avoided by diversion.

<sup>43</sup> Although contrast is achieved by means of the juxtaposed tonal areas these devices, as seen above, are themselves problematic.

by the thematic processes of tonal music: there is simply too much repetition. Thus, where the minuet theme with its rhythmic manipulations produces an explicit reference to earlier “Classical” aesthetics (and indeed to Classical humour) the exaggeration of the conventions of this earlier style produces a parodic effect: it objectifies the normal conventions of the music, casting them in an ironic light.<sup>44</sup>

The minuet therefore comprises an accumulation of ironic incongruities: its parodic nature is compounded by parabases created by tonal juxtapositions and metrical incongruities. This interpretation, however, is also supported by the context in which this accumulation of incongruities occurs. The irony that pervades the first movement sets the backdrop to this movement: irony already forms a convention of the quartet, and this convention suggests at least the possibility of further irony in subsequent movements. As a result, the incongruities in this movement relate to the irony of the first movement: within this ironic context, these incongruities are cast into greater prominence and given a parodic, ironic interpretation.

The trio section confirms this ironic interpretation: the overt parabasis and irony of this section surpass that of the minuet. Nevertheless they are derived from the same sources: like the minuet the trio broadly comprises a ternary structure, with similar problematic contrasts between subsections. Similarly, tonal and metrical incongruities predominate, here producing striking displacement of the beat. However, to this the trio adds further layers of incongruity, in the form of a paradoxical foregrounding of “meaningless” music, and a striking, disruptive final moment of parabasis.

The opening of the trio section introduces three key incongruities. It begins with an evocation of a “rustic” musette, the pedal points in the two violins imitating the drone of a bagpipe. Whilst it is not unusual for folk-like elements to appear within quartet movements, here the absolute harmonic and melodic stasis that is produced

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<sup>44</sup> Witness the manner in which Kerman, Lam and Chua all relate this to earlier “Classical” aesthetics: Kerman and Lam relate it specifically to Mozart (see again, the quotations in footnote 44 above); Chua considers that the minuet “was already an anachronism in 1825” (Chua (1995) p. 109), which, he adds, is enough to give this movement the air of a parody.

comes as something of a shock, the strangeness of its effect being heightened by the high register and absence of the lower parts. The melody comprises the most stable degrees of the scale – the submediant to the mediant – a range that includes only one semitone, C# to D.<sup>45</sup> This limited range and lack of semitonal movement minimises melodic impetus, an effect compounded by the pedal point, which introduces an absolute harmonic stasis – tonic harmony for twenty-two bars. Such a melodic and harmonic stasis is incongruous, striking against the conventional norms of the “Classical” style – tonal motion and melodic contrast. Even if this opposition is mediated by the fact that it originates in a musette topic, it is still an unusual, incongruous occurrence.

This incongruity, however, is compounded by the lack of tonal contrast between the minuet and trio. The whole premise of the trio section is to achieve contrast, particularly tonal contrast, with the preceding minuet. The fact that this trio occurs in the tonic means the most striking tonal contrasts of the movement, which should, according to convention, have occurred between sections, now occur in the “wrong” place – within them. This produces a subtle reversal of formal function, which, together with the tonal and melodic stasis, combines to produce a particularly striking incongruity.

The rhythmic uncertainty of the trio adds to this incongruity. In its original form the C#, E and A of bars 199 to 121 occurred on the first beat.<sup>46</sup> This original rhythm still persists here in the manner in which the arpeggios in bars 121 and 130 to 132 enter on the third beat. This third beat emphasis, however is opposed to the phrasing of the melody, which strongly supports the barring in the score: the F# and D in bars 123 sound like accented neighbour notes in a turn figure; the movement to the tonic and minim duration of the Es and C#s produce strong downbeats on the first beats of bars 124, 128, 130 etc.

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<sup>45</sup> Actually the supertonic B does also appear in the parallel line of the second violin. Its importance is diminished by this secondary role, as well as by the fact that it occurs as a lower neighbour-note on a weak beat of the bar. In any case, it is the avoidance of the leading note that is most marked – its absence removes melodic/harmonic impetus to a large degree.

<sup>46</sup> See the quotations below of the original dance movements from which the themes of this movement are drawn.



Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

The larger central section of the trio compounds this incongruity. In bar 141 the stasis of the preceding bars is broken, the dominant seventh on C# finally supplying the harmonic impetus required to break away from the tonic. In itself, however, this sudden change produces an incongruity: this central section is so different from the “static” theme that it produces not simply contrast but rather juxtaposition – an interruption by markedly different material similar to those of the first movement.

More importantly, the intrusion of this much-needed movement comes too early – the entire section following is shifted one beat early, with beat three functioning as beat one.<sup>47</sup> This shifting of the metre is achieved through strong harmonic motion: the bass changes harmony on the third beat and is held over the barline, whilst the simple sequential motion and the placing of the root note on the first and third quaver

<sup>47</sup> This shifting causes some rhythmic ambiguity in bars 141/142 – the dominant seventh in bar 141 does first sound like the third beat. Nevertheless, by the time bar 143 arrives the change has been made and the new metre established.

of each group underline the harmonic changes, forcing the sense of pulse onto the wrong beat. This shifting of the metre leads to rhythmic clashes of the type seen in the minuet. In bars 145/146, for example, the beat is shifted back onto the “correct” place by the four-beat dominant seventh on B and the subsequent strong cadential bass line in bars 147/148. The sudden change to C# major in bar 149/150, however, occurs once more on the third beat, producing a conflict of metre identical to the one that began the section.<sup>48</sup>

Ex. 4.12, Op. 132, 2nd Movement

<sup>48</sup> Note that almost identical clashes occur in bars 169 to 174 and bars 190 to 194.



The shifting of the beat, combined with the intrusive change in bar 141, is itself a clear indicator of authorial parabasis, destabilising the metre and displaying the composer's ability to manipulate, even destroy the most basic elements of his material. This element of parabasis, though, is heightened by the fact that all the material of this trio section derives from quotations of Beethoven's own work, the *Largo* of the Piano Trio Op. 1 no. 2:<sup>49</sup>

#### Example 4.13

Op. 1, no. 2, 2nd Movement



Chua adds that both the opening section and the contrasting figuration from bar 157 are also self-quotations:<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> This derivation is identified by Lam (Lam (1975) p. 90).

<sup>50</sup> Chua (1995) p. 133

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## Allemande, WoO 81



Crucially these self-quotations add the element of self-reflexivity to the incongruities of this section. By referring to his own previous musical “statements” Beethoven directly introduces his own “presence” into the music, a procedure that already gives these dance figurations an objectified air.<sup>51</sup> This objectification is increased, though, by the fact that there is an “incorrect” use of self-quotation here. In the original the figurations begin on the main beats, coinciding with the harmonic changes. Although the barring of the original is reflected in the quotations, from bar 141 onwards the quotation is shifted one beat too early. The metrical incongruities and the type of disruptive parabasis that occurs between the first “Allemande” and the “trio” quotations may therefore be seen to derive from the incorrect use of quotation of this passage.

The exaggeratedly simple use of these quotations compounds their objectification. The sequential motion of the “trio” quotation, for example, is underscored by the most basic of bass lines; the imitation between parts is too obvious; the thematic figure itself too simple. Moreover, the section simply spins out the same circle of fifths progressions relentlessly, without really going anywhere. This exaggeration

<sup>51</sup> In such cases the quotation effectively occurs as what Bakhtin terms a “represented, objectified word . . . the direct speech of characters” (Bakhtin (1929) p. 154). Moreover, such occurrences were considered to be self-reflexive gestures in the second chapter of this thesis. Whichever terminology is used the important point is that these quotations already possess the element of objectification: they occur not as “direct authorial speech”, but as represented objects.

already produces a somewhat parodic air – it is a too-obvious, exaggeratedly simple example of a textbook sequential figuration.<sup>52</sup>

However, this exaggerated simplicity is problematic on other grounds. As in the scherzo, this entire section from bar 141 to 205 is built from little more than fragments: a simple 5 – 2 descent on the dominant followed by a turn around the root note (bars 141 – 143), and arpeggios and scales (bars 157 – 161). In themselves these simple figures are utterly banal: their inherent simplicity, combined with the over-conventional sequential motion, and the constant, unbroken quaver motion that results from the continual repetition of these closely related figures serves to foreground this banality.<sup>53</sup>

Although the over-simplicity of this section seems designed to maximise the contrast with this intrusion in bar 206,<sup>54</sup> the foregrounding of this banal material also produces another ironic reversal. This centres on the crucial point that the “themes” of this trio are not actually thematic at all, but rather functional figurations. Within the “Classical” style such figurations normally function as transitions between themes, to modulate or to underline tonal sections, for example; as such they are virtually meaningless in and of themselves. The fact that a large part of this trio consists entirely of such “meaningless” functional figuration, of such exaggerated simplicity, continuing for so long, and going nowhere harmonically is therefore significant – by focussing on these figurations the music imparts a certain “meaning” or importance to them.<sup>55</sup> The result of this is a paradoxical situation whereby the inherently meaningless becomes meaningful. This paradox is intrinsically ironic, a reversal of convention whereby the functional nature – the “meaning” – of the

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<sup>52</sup> As Chua notes, although these figurations are quotations, nevertheless “both the trio and the Allemande . . . are obviously using a stock progression” (Chua (1995) p. 263 n.40)

<sup>53</sup> Since all of these figures are six notes long and joined together seamlessly the contrast between them is minimised, at least rhythmically.

<sup>54</sup> Chua, for example, relates the effect created by the continual repetition of the banal figures to boredom or monotony, which, he argues, produces a contrast with the Sublime interruption that follows (Chua (1995) p. 110 and 137).

<sup>55</sup> It could be argued that, since this allemande figuration is actually a self-quotation, this music is not really “meaningless”. Despite its origins, however, the manner in which it is used in this section – as exaggeratedly simple, textbook sequences, continually spinning out for over sixty bars – means that the banality of the music is foregrounded. In other words, its purely functional nature becomes the “meaning” or focus of the passage.



figurations has now become the “theme” of the trio. Combined with the use of self-quotation (indeed, self-quotation that is used incorrectly) the parodic exaggeration of this meaningless music produces a self-parody, a self-reflexive, self-mocking parabasis: in effect, Beethoven ironises himself. This adds a significant self-ironising level to the different levels of irony already indicated – the intrusive juxtapositions and parody of classical norms.<sup>56</sup>

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The interruption that occurs in bar 206 is the clearest instance of parabasis in the whole movement, and one of the strongest in the entire quartet. There is a sudden, inexplicable change from A major to C# minor, and a striking disruption of the light-hearted dance of the trio by a markedly dramatic new theme. This ultra-serious, quasi-operatic theme is the first truly thematic music of the trio (and arguably of the whole movement), a theme that would not be out of place in a sonata movement.<sup>57</sup> In addition to the contrasts of key and topic there is therefore also a conflict of strongly *thematic* material with the “meaningless” figuration that precedes it.

As so often in this movement metrical issues are important in this interruption. On one hand this decisive new theme firmly establishes the 3/4 metre for the first time: it occurs after another “correction” of the metre (bars 201 – 205), entirely halting the cross-rhythm effect that has dominated the central section of the trio. However, the *L’istesso tempo* section that follows produces a significant opposition of duple and triple metres, incongruous within this context: the introduction of the duple metre is a complete violation of the fundamental “dance” basis of the trio.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> In addition, as considered above, the metrical play and clashes in this passage can be understood as a parodic reference to the type of rhythmic play seen in Haydn’s minuets. This, again, adds another level to the irony of this section.

<sup>57</sup> Indeed, this opera seria topic is itself almost exaggeratedly serious. Its appearance in this context is, as will be considered, incongruous in itself, but this incongruity does render the intruding theme somewhat inauthentic: it simply sounds overblown and overly dramatic.

<sup>58</sup> Duple metre bars do, of course, occur in dance movements in the form of hemiolas, producing stylistically expected fluctuations in metre that do not interrupt the basic pulse and that resolve without problem. Indeed, Chua argues that this *L’istesso tempo* section is actually a written-out hemiola that “corrects” the metrical problems of the trio. As a result, he considers that the return to the Allemande that follows appears on the correct beat of the bar (despite the barlines) (Chua (1995)

The musical score for Ex. 4.15, Op. 132, 2nd Movement, measures 200-210, is presented below. The score is for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. Measures 200-210 show a dynamic shift from forte (f) to piano (p) and back to forte (sf). Measure 211 is marked 'L'istesso tempo'.

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

L'istesso tempo

p. 124/125). I think though, that the *subito piano* and change to A major on the third beat of bar 221 conflicts with Chua's interpretation – the return of Allemande starts here, *interrupting* the C# minor section, not on the following beat where the theme enters. (Moreover, the cross-rhythms within the Allemande considered above mean that, regardless of what beat this theme begins on, its metre is uncertain.) The duple time L'istesso tempo is therefore a complete change of metre after all, producing a topic that is markedly "non-dance" in origin and effect.

L'istesso tempo

220

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*p dolce*

*cresc.*

*poco a*

230

*poco*

*dim.*

*p*

*piu p*

*pp*

*D.C. al Fine*

These sixteen bars therefore violate the conventions of the trio section entirely, producing a sudden, disruptive juxtaposition of topics, metre and key that shifts discursive levels in a very obvious manner. This obvious authorial intrusion is

clearly related to the first movement: it echoes both the semitone movement of the motif and the disruption in the development of that movement, producing the same shift in levels and the same objectification.

The manner in which this dramatic theme is subsequently juxtaposed with the return of the bucolic musette demonstrates this objectification most clearly: the return to triple metre, to A major and to melodic/harmonic stasis after the dramatic events of the preceding bars sounds particularly naïve, and inherently artificial. The end of this codetta-like section, though, also produces a final metrical twist. The syncopations and ascending arpeggios in bars 236 to 238 repeatedly stress the third beat of the bar. This sounds like a simple reiteration of a stable tonic, but it actually momentarily shifts the sense of pulse from the first beat to the third.

The effect of this is that when the da capo occurs there is an even more uncertain metrical basis to the repeat of the opening bars than at the first occurrence: one is uncertain which of the first three notes of the ascending unison passage is accented. Moreover, even the final cadence of the movement is problematic: whereas on its first occurrence the missing beat in bar 119 is accounted for by the upbeat to the trio section, here it is missing altogether. The combination of this with the weak resolution on the second beat of the bar means that the final “closure” of the movement is metrically undermined.

The repeat of the minuet section thus highlights the inherent metrical issues of the movement, with this final metrical uncertainty concluding the incongruities that have dominated the movement. These, together with the unmediated tonal juxtapositions and thematic irregularities, run throughout both the minuet and the trio, augmented by the incongruities of “static” themes, extended passages of “meaningless” music, interruptions and self-reflexive parody.<sup>59</sup> These elements already produce, in some cases, a paradoxical reversal of function, and indeed already strongly indicate a basic

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<sup>59</sup> To this one might add the type of satirical irony that Chua finds in the dance movements of this quartet. The ironic social critique, achieved through the incongruities of these dance movements, forms an extra level to the already multi-layered irony of this work, in the same way that the works of Tieck, Brentano, Goethe and Schlegel himself have a satirical level to their Romantic irony.

objectification and irony. The moments of parabasis and the destruction of illusion caused by the intrusion at the end of the trio are therefore, as in the first movement, only the most obvious of a continual chain of authorial manipulations. These interruptions, incongruous changes of topic and paradoxical reversals dominate the movement, producing a constant alternation of creation and destruction, assertion and negation.

### Third Movement

The relationship of contrariety that links the first two movements also occurs between the third and fourth movements. Together with the *attacca* between the fourth movement and finale, this seems to naturally separate these movements from the first, dividing the quartet into two large groupings:



However, the irony of the first two movements is also present throughout the remaining movements. Together with the parallelism between the opposed first and second, and third and fourth movements, this produces a strong relationship between the two groups.

For example, the quiet contrapuntal opening of the third movement seems designed to evoke that of the first movement, underlining the manner in which this movement returns to earlier issues. The incongruous juxtaposition of elements and topics from the first movement is here magnified into the opposition of juxtaposed formal sections. Indeed this third movement more than any other is organised in terms of fundamental oppositions, both within the respective sections and especially between them. The first Adagio section, for example, may be considered in terms of three oppositions – modality vs. diatonicism, polyphony vs. homophony and vocal music



vs. instrumental – each of which is projected and developed across the subsequent course of the entire movement.

The opening bars form the nucleus of the tonal structure of the entire Adagio section: the alternation between the chords of F and C reflects the tension between these two tonal centres that occurs throughout the Adagio. This duality of tonal centre is due to the “Lydian” mode of Beethoven’s inscription. In effect this entire section operates in a tension between two poles: the dominant seventh of the tonic (F) cannot be formed due to the lydian fourth, preventing strong diatonic resolution. At the same time, because of diatonic convention every appearance of B natural undermines the stability of the tonic key, pushing the tonality in the direction of the dominant (C).

Ex. 4.16 Op. 132 3rd movement

**Molto adagio**

Violin I  
Violin II  
Viola  
Violoncello

*sotto voce*  
*cresc.*  
*sotto voce*  
*cresc.*  
*sotto voce*  
*cresc.*  
*sotto voce*  
*cresc.*

7  
*p*  
*p*  
*p*  
*p*  
*p*  
*p*

The tonal ambiguity of this section, however, reflects a larger opposition that exists across the movement between the modal tonality of this Adagio and the diatonic context within which it occurs. The B natural of the lydian mode implies C as a tonal centre because of the conventions of *diatonic* music: in the earlier historical context of modal tonality this tension would not be felt. B natural thus functions as a

focal point in an opposition of the modal conventions of the Adagio section and overall diatonic context. Significantly it is precisely this opposition of modality and diatonicism that, as will be seen, informs the contrast between the Adagio and Andante sections of the movement.

The opening Adagio section also establishes two other oppositions that inform the overall contrasts between the sections of the movement. The first is between homophony and polyphony: the polyphonic entries at the beginning of each of the five phrases of the section are answered by the homophonic second part of each phrase, thereby creating this opposition within each phrase. This opposition is closely linked to the second, the opposition of specifically “vocal” and “instrumental” musical contexts. Kerman writes

The mystic aura is furthered by the unnaturally slow tempo and the scoring or, rather, by what seems to be an unnaturally slow tempo on account of that scoring. The image is orchestral: forty strings could sustain the hymn at this speed with comfort, but four can bear it only with a sense of strain, tenuousness and a certain gaucherie. This Beethoven certainly wanted, as the contrast with the superbly idiomatic instrumental sound of the B section implies clearly enough.<sup>60</sup>

This “sense of strain” is undoubtedly an unusual and significant part of the aesthetic of this Adagio. However, it is created not through the scoring of an “orchestral image” for quartet, but rather by the re-scoring of a “vocal image” – a specific reference to Renaissance vocal polyphony (rather than simply a *cantabile* style). This “reference” is seen in the compass of the melodic lines of each phrase, which are confined within an octave, in the alternation of polyphony and homophony, and finally in the quality – the actual ‘shape’ – of the musical line, which evokes specifically vocal music. The “vocal image” of this Adagio, though, is a specific reference to the style of a hymn – the “Heiliger Dankgesang” (“Holy Song of Thanksgiving”) of Beethoven’s inscription. The use of an ancient modal tonality, however, produces a *historical* reference to a specifically religious musical past, by invoking a specifically “sacred” music from musical history.

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<sup>60</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 256, emphasis added

The peculiarity of this Adagio is therefore created by the appearance of a stylisation of archaic vocal polyphony within the context of an instrumental quartet. This opposition of a “vocal” medium within an “instrumental” context, however, also introduces a subtle irony. In a normal context the “instrumental” element is entirely unimportant – it forms a basic convention of every string quartet. The appearance of the vocal stylisation within this Adagio section, though, creates an incongruous opposition of two contexts present simultaneously. The fact that, as Kerman notes, the instruments have difficulty maintaining the vocal idiom highlights this incongruity, foregrounding the conflict of vocal and instrumental conventions. In effect, this objectifies the inherent artifice of the “instrumental” element.

One final important point remains. Throughout this entire section there is an uncharacteristic lack of dissonance – even prepared dissonances such as suspensions are avoided. This lack of dissonance is actually somewhat foreign to the style of polyphony that Beethoven is stylising: in the absence of strong tonal movement dissonances provided the music with melodic/harmonic impetus. It may be that this absence of dissonance is intended to imply an older style of polyphony here, by producing a certain austerity. However, combined with the lack of resolution onto either of the tonal centres, the *sotto voce* dynamic level and the very slow tempo, the lack of dissonance produces a certain stasis, a suspension of harmonic and rhythmic movement. This creates the effect of this Adagio as a static, timeless object, rather than a dynamic, unfolding linear movement. The dialogue that ensues between this stasis and the reintroduction of dissonance that subsequently occurs will be significant to the “meaning” of the music.

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Aside from the context of the Heiliger Dankgesang, the opening bars of the first Andante section present a straightforward dance topic, whose major key and slow tempo produce a certain “dignified” connotation. In contrast to the dances in the preceding movement, there is a stable triple time with strong downbeats on the first quavers of each bar and conventional accompaniment figures in viola and cello. This

stable rhythm is underlined by the regular alternation of the robust movement of the wide, staccato leaps (with forte dynamics and sforzando accents) in bars 31, 33 and 35 and the “lyrical” melodic motion and piano dynamic in bars 32, 34 and 36.

Ex. 4.17 Op. 132 3rd Movement

(Andante)

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

31

39

44

*f* *p* *f* *p cresc.* *f sf* *p* *cresc.*

*ten.* *f sf* *p* *f* *p* *f* *p* *cresc.*

*f* *p* *f* *p* *f* *p* *f* *p* *cresc.*

*f* *p* *f* *p* *f* *p* *f* *p* *cresc.*

*tr.* *ten.* *tr.* *ten.* *ten.*

*p* *cresc.* *p* *cresc.* *p* *cresc.* *p* *cresc.*

However, it is the relationship between the *Neue Kraft fühlend* section and the preceding *Heiliger Dankgesang* that forms the fundamental generative force of this movement. As indicated, the same oppositions that arose in the initial *Adagio* section occur as oppositions *between* the two formal sections. Moreover, the objectification that began in the *Adagio* also occurs between the *Adagio* and *Andante* sections, resulting in the ironic objectification of the *Andante*.

The major key of the *Andante* proves to be of particular significance to this objectification process, when understood as a specific signifier of diatonicism in general. Within the context of the other movements of this work (indeed of the overwhelming majority of tonal music) this element is so prevalent as to be almost insignificant. However this particular movement opposes the diatonicism of the *Andante* section with the modality of the preceding hymn, in the “most extreme possible contrast”.<sup>61</sup> This larger “structural” opposition functions as an enlargement of the fundamental opposition that occurred within the structure of the hymn, a projection of the structure of the *Adagio* onto the larger structure of the entire movement.

This same process occurs in the opposition of vocal and instrumental idioms. This *Andante* possesses strong elements of conventional quartet writing – wide leaps, trills, and contrasts of dynamic and articulation for example: as Kerman states this section is a “superbly idiomatic instrumental sound”.<sup>62</sup> Again, within the context of the preceding hymn, this assumes greater than normal significance, producing an opposition with the “vocal” element of the hymn. Indeed, since the conventions of the hymn become established as those of the movement simply because they occur at the beginning, the sudden juxtaposition of the contrasting *Andante* section effectively contravenes these conventions. Although this is, to an extent, part of the normal process of contrast in music, in this case the nature of the contrast – a sudden juxtaposition – results in an incongruity.

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<sup>61</sup> Lam (1975) p. 91

<sup>62</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 256



This occurs because of a striking ironic reversal of 'norms' within these two sections. As considered, the modal tonality and vocal idiom of the hymn section are entirely unconventional within the diatonic context in which they occur. Nevertheless, within this specific movement these unconventional elements have become the convention – the "norm". In contrast, the normally conventional diatonicism and "instrumental" texture of the Andante becomes unconventional, resulting in the foregrounding of the "normal" context. In other words, the conventions of tonal instrumental music, which would be almost banal in another context, here become objects of the discourse. This produces a reversal: the conventional becomes unconventional, the novel becomes normal, resulting in the ironic objectification of the conventionality of the Andante section.

This process is of the same type that A.W. Schlegel identifies in Shakespeare – a juxtaposition of genres that produces an ironic objectification by opposing two incongruous viewpoints or sets of conventions. In this case the incongruity of the Heiliger Dankgesang and the Neue Kraft sections objectifies the latter section, foregrounding its conventions and revealing its aesthetic artifice.

However, incongruities within the Neue Kraft section add to this objectification. The first sixteen bars, for example, are exaggeratedly simple: the harmonic progressions throughout the section are particularly simple; Kerman describes them as "lucid, even simple-minded . . . freely indulging the two common chords denied to the Lydian mode, the subdominant and the dominant 7<sup>th</sup>".<sup>63</sup> Similarly the melodic lines are simple and lyrical (indeed, verging on the banal in places) with the phrases well defined by thoroughly conventional cadences. As Kerman states "Beethoven has rarely written such beautiful lyric phrases".<sup>64</sup>

When compared with the preceding movement of this quartet (or indeed to the other late quartets) the conventionality of this dance is exaggerated – it is too simple. This over-conventionality, however, is particularly prominent because of the juxtaposition

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. p. 256/257

with the preceding Adagio. Although the opening Adagio section is itself in an archaic musical language the novelty of this hymn within a quartet movement is particularly striking and unconventional. The contrast of the unconventional hymn with the too-simple structure of the Andante foregrounds the conventionality of the latter section: next to the hymn the Neue Kraft sounds like an archaic stylisation of a “Classical” quartet movement, its simplicity maximising the contrast between the sections.

As considered above, stylisation involves, by definition, an element of objectification. However, this latent objectification is compounded by an incongruous disruption which begins at bar 47 with a deflection of the cadential motion of the previous two bars introducing a new melodic figure.<sup>65</sup> In bar 51 there is another sudden change of melodic figure, which seems to interrupt or divert this new material. The abrupt change to demisemiquaver motion, combined with the repeated-note syncopations produces an increase in the rhythmic movement, augmented by the crescendo in bar 53 and the strong harmonic movement from subdominant to dominant. However, the melodic line in bars 53 and 54 remains stationary, repeating a 2-beat chromatic figure around B flat. This repetition, over a dominant seventh pedal that lasts three bars, produces a momentary lack of forward momentum that is unprecedented in the section – a rhythmic and melodic stasis that is itself incongruous. Moreover, the repetition of this figure produces a hemiola effect that momentarily disrupts the triple metre of the dance. The combination of this rhythmic disruption with the harmonic and melodic stasis, the too-great repetition of the chromatic figure and the rhythmic and dynamic increases in these bars momentarily interrupts the progression of the music.

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<sup>65</sup> The expected A major occurs not as a new tonic, but rather as a dominant seventh; in effect, the cadence is avoided. Although in itself this is explicable as a normal prolongation, the bars that follow extend this ‘normal’ practice to the point of incongruity.

(Andante)

The effect of this disruption is compounded by the cadence that follows. The movement back to the subdominant at the beginning of bar 55 diverts the cadential tonic chord that is expected after the extended dominant harmony.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, the conventional cadence figure in bars 55 and 56 is itself avoided in bar 57 by a repeat of bar 47, which holds the dominant harmony over the barline. This dual cadential avoidance (twice in three bars) thereby actually continues the disruption of the music.

The immediate repetition of the entire passage from bar 47 to 56 prolongs the effect of these bars yet further: all of the cadential avoidance, melodic diversions and rhythmic problems are repeated. Moreover, there is another problematic cadence at the end of this repeat (bars 66/67) that is not so much avoided as pre-empted – the tonic chord arrives a beat early, on the third beat of the bar. This substantially

<sup>66</sup> The momentary C# diminished harmony on the final semiquaver beat of bar 54 tends, in the context to maintain a dominant function. The movement to G in the bass thus smoothes the transition from dominant to subdominant harmonies.

weakens the closure (an effect compounded by the transformation of D major from tonic to dominant seventh on the first beat of the following bar).<sup>67</sup>

The effect of the disruptive passage in the middle of the Andante section is significant. The combination of cadence avoidance, rhythmic disruption and melodic/harmonic stasis is incongruous within the preceding context of the Andante. In effect, it destroys the aesthetic illusion of the music, exposing the artifice of its conventions. This disruption of the 'norms' of the section effectively transforms it from a simple stylisation into a parody, albeit a mild one. The conventionality of these norms becomes an object of the discourse: through exaggeration and disruption their aesthetic "reality" is challenged, a "destruction of illusion" that produces the effect of parabasis.

Although this parabasis effect does arise from the elements within this movement alone, it is also related to the parabasis, reversals and ironic paradoxes of the earlier movements. Indeed, although the incongruities and disruptions within this Andante section are considerably less intrusive than those that occur in the surrounding movements, nevertheless this context gives these moments greater prominence than might otherwise be the case. In effect, the irony of the preceding movements heightens the effect of the parabasis in this movement, making its effect more pronounced: we hear in these disruptive elements echoes of the same ironic presence that pervaded the first two movements.

The presence of these ironic elements and parabasis has particular significance for the "meaning" of the movement. The two contrasting sections represent different aesthetic viewpoints, different "systems" in Schlegel's terminology: the modal, vocal system of the hymn is opposed by the diatonic, instrumental system of the Andante. However, the Andante is objectified both by the initial juxtaposition with the hymn and by the parodic effect produced by the incongruities within its own structure. The

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<sup>67</sup> It is worth noting that cadence avoidance that goes beyond the bounds of normal prolongation procedures is, again, an essential element of the incongruity of this passage. This relates the ironic process in this section to those of the preceding movements, which both involved frequent cadential diversions.

result is that the Adagio section is ‘preferred’ over the stylised, over-conventional system of the Andante (which becomes the object of irony) and this ironic preferencing has a significant effect upon the reading of this movement.

On one level the exuberant dance that forms the Andante section appears to reflect the “renewed strength” of Beethoven’s inscription “Neue Kraft fühlend”: as Michael Steinberg writes “the staccatos, the wide leaps, the exuberant upbeats in scurrying thirty-second notes, the jubilant violin trill that rides across the top of the music, the breathless excitement in the accompaniment, all contribute to the joyful atmosphere”.<sup>68</sup> However, the objectification of this dance section may be read programmatically as an ironic reversal, an undermining of its “new strength”. From this viewpoint the reality of this strength becomes an artifice – an ironised object of the discourse. This reversal, together with the parodic elements and the authorial parabasis, continues throughout the movement in a continual paradox of art and artifice, creation and destruction, i.e. in Romantic irony.

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The remaining formal sections of this movement are essentially developmental, producing, in the case of the two returns of the Adagio section, the effect of a variation movement. The first variation of the hymn, for example, introduces the dissonance that was denied to the first occurrence. Throughout this section the first violin functions like a cantus firmus, exactly repeating its part in the homophonic bars of the original hymn, whilst the lower parts introduce rhythmically altered versions of the original lines.<sup>69</sup> These new syncopated lines interact with the cantus firmus to produce a series of suspensions in the top two parts. From bar 93, for example, the second violin line plays a syncopated version of the viola line of bars 9 to 11, producing a chain of 4-3 and 9-8 suspensions:

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<sup>68</sup> Steinberg, Michael (1994) “The Late Quartets” in Winter, Robert and Martin, Robert (eds.) (1994) *The Beethoven Quartet Companion* p. 271

<sup>69</sup> The second violin actually takes the “contrapuntal” beginning of each of the first violin’s phrases as the basis for its variations, adding syncopations that produce suspensions against the lower parts. Other part redistributions occur, for example between second violin and viola in bars 93 to 97, but despite these (and the octave transfers) the melodic lines of this first variation largely follow those of the original.



92 (Molto adagio)

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

97

These suspensions introduce the dissonance that was so prominently absent from the original version of the hymn: the comparison between the two versions means that the dissonances of these suspensions produce an atypically powerful, almost novel effect, which de Marliave describes as “ecstatic exaltation”; Kerman as a “mystic aura”.<sup>70</sup>

Paradoxically, however, the same elements that produced such effect in the Adagio produce within the development of the Andante section even greater disruption and objectification than appeared in the original. The beginning of the development actually achieves a simplifying effect; as Lam states, “the second version of the

<sup>70</sup> de Marliave, Joseph (1928) *Beethoven's Quartets* p. 346, and Kerman (1967) p. 256. This “comparison”, though, actually occurs within the first variation of the hymn. Since, in this development the first violin repeats the “theme” of the Adagio it may be taken as signifying, in some respects, the original version of that hymn; the three remaining parts, in contrast, represent the development of the original. From this viewpoint there is a type of opposition, or perhaps a dialogue, between the two versions *within* this first variation. This produces an intriguing reading of this section. It is the interaction of the original version (in the form of the first violin) with the new variations that produces the suspensions, produces, in other words, a beauty that was not present in that original, that was indeed denied to it.

*Andante* makes definite figures (for example, scales) out of the fragmented decorations of the first statement".<sup>71</sup> However, the introduction of new rhythmic and harmonic elements affects the problematic central sub-section of this *Andante* (the section corresponding to bars 47 to 67 in the original version), disrupting and undermining the music's progression more fully than in the original.

The most obvious moment is the rhythmic alterations that begin at bar 145. The elaboration in the first violin and the transformation of the constant demisemiquaver accompaniment places greater emphasis on the main beats of the bar, producing an increase in rhythmic movement. This is matched by greater harmonic tension and dissonance, caused primarily by the increased chromaticism of these bars. Bars 147/148 centre on the three semitones from G# to B and, whereas the slower speed of chromatic alternation in the original kept the harmonic progression lucid, here the speed of the alteration obscures this, producing an effect very similar to a false relation. In fact, virtually every chromatic alternation in the melody produces dissonance with the accompaniment, for example the tritone A – D# in bar 146 and the false relations between G and G# in both bars 147 and 148, which occur over already-dissonant diminished harmony.

The accumulation of these dissonances, combined with the too-great accumulation of harmony, melody and dynamic and the hemiola effect increases the incongruity seen in the original *Andante*. This rhythmic and harmonic accretion creates an almost a-rhythmic dissonance that borders on an obsessive, hysterical quality, a distressing flash that is incongruous with the joyful movement of the *Neue Kraft* dance. This disruptive effect spills over into the cadence in bars 149–151, the increased rhythmic movement and displaced bass line making it even more unsteady than the first occurrence.

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<sup>71</sup> Lam (1975) p. 92

145 (Andante)

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

pp

cresc. -

148

rf

p

This disruption of the dance is also significant because, up to this point this developmental variation is entirely congruent with the original Andante. However, although the listener expects the recurrence both of the juxtaposition of the Adagio and Andante sections and of the disruptions that occur in the original Andante,<sup>72</sup> the accumulation of dissonances etc. in these bars is not expected – they are, within this context, entirely unconventional. This intensified disruption therefore re-exposes the conventions of the dance in a more severe, confrontational manner, resulting in the re-objectification of the Neue Kraft.

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The final Adagio section continues the developmental process of the previous sections, with new rhythmic and harmonic elements producing fresh oppositions.

<sup>72</sup> These elements, in other words, have become conventions of the movement. Witness Lam's statement regarding the necessity of the return of the Andante: "The movement's formal scheme (A-B-A-B-A) needs this return, but whereas the hymn, in its affinity with the old chorale partitas, virtually demands variation, the contrasting section is already on its first appearance a variation on an unstated theme, and further elaboration would be unsatisfactory" (Lam (1975) p. 92)

These combine with those of the original hymn in the climax at the centre of the section to produce the most semantically-full moment of the movement.

This climactic final section is constructed from canonic entries of two themes. The first is a further rhythmic development of the theme of the second Adagio section, to which a neighbour-note figure on the high C is added. This theme occurs in counterpoint with the first five notes of the cantus firmus theme, which itself remained unchanged from the original hymn. The double counterpoint of these themes produces a contrast between the rhythmic movement of the syncopated theme and the slow, almost static motion of the cantus firmus melody, an uneasy balance similar to the contrast of diatonicism and modality that occurred in the first version of the hymn.

This opposition reaches its climax in bars 187-193. Here the syncopated theme is reduced to the neighbour-note figure, centring on only a few notes. This functions as a repetitive counterpoint to the climactic statement of the cantus firmus, which occurs in its entirety in canon between the upper and lower parts. Despite the rhythmic movement the repetition of these few notes introduces a melodic stasis. Simultaneously the *sf* emphasis on the cantus firmus means that at the climactic moment this “static” theme is dominant. Finally, the homophony of the climactic bars, in stark contrast to the polyphony of the preceding course of the section, intensifies this static effect, halting the forward momentum of the music: as Radcliffe writes, “motion is reduced to a minimum”.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Radcliffe, Philip (1965) *Beethoven's String Quartets* p.118

**Molto adagio**

Crucially, the canonic entries of the cantus firmus, a fifth apart (bars 188/189) introduce striking dissonances. Lam comments that

Beethoven intuitively rediscovers the severe diatonic dissonances of thirteenth-century *Ars Antiqua*, combined with a non-harmonic counterpoint in which parts cross like tenor and contra-tenor in the early fifteenth century, as though the concept of the triad and its inversions belonged to a future age . . . this passage [bars 170ff.] belongs to a pre-Renaissance world into which an emancipated dominant seventh has insinuated itself.<sup>74</sup>

These “diatonic” dissonances – ninths, unresolved dominant sevenths and unprepared fourths – dominate within the climactic bars 188 to 194. The combination of this “diatonic” dissonance with the extremes of register, pitch and dynamic produces a harshness “as brutal as anything in the Great Fugue; the sheer volume generated terrifies”.<sup>75</sup> Lam’s comments, though, highlight a crucial issue with regard to this dissonant effect – it results from the structural opposition of diatonicism and modality of the original hymn. Although within a modal context the unprepared fourths and unresolved sevenths that occur are not considered dissonances, within a diatonic context they sound harsh and dissonant. Thus the

<sup>74</sup> Lam (1975) p. 93

<sup>75</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 260



effect of these bars results, again, from the opposition between the tonal contexts within which this movement operates.

This extreme, dissonant climax also produces a final opposition of the “vocal” and “instrumental” idioms of the first Adagio. Throughout this and the previous Adagio sections the *cantus firmus* has remained essentially “vocal” in nature, signifying the original version of the hymn. In this climactic section however, the extremes of pitch and dynamic transform this theme, for the first time, into an entirely instrumental utterance. This produces an incongruity: to some extent, this theme still retains its “vocal” significance, yet here it is clearly a non-vocal, “instrumental” element. Therefore it is perceived, from a certain viewpoint, as both simultaneously, creating an incongruous reversal within these bars.<sup>76</sup>

More importantly, however, the transformation of the Adagio produces a striking reversal between itself and the Neue Kraft sections. The accumulation of extremes in the climax of the final Adagio section – extremes of dynamics, accentuation, register, dissonance and the overwhelming stasis – introduces a strikingly novel power that is absent from previous versions of the Adagio. The force of this climax, however, is also semantic in nature: these bars produce a culmination of all of the oppositions of the movement, the end of a process of transformational, developmental ‘becoming’ that has spanned the previous sections. These bars focus the semantic weight of this process and of all the preceding music on one point of overwhelming force.

The inscriptions throughout this movement invite us to read this process

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<sup>76</sup> Indeed it is tempting to consider not only this reversal but also the entire contrast between the final and original versions of the Adagio as incongruous. The final climactic bars reverse the original elements: the vocal idiom becomes instrumental, consonance becomes striking dissonance and the balance between homophony and polyphonic is disturbed. In effect, this final variation moves far beyond the original, almost violating its conventions or ‘norms’ – the climactic bars are perceived as markedly different from the earlier Adagio(s). Nevertheless, since the two versions are fundamentally the same substance there are, from a certain viewpoint, simultaneous incongruent semantic levels – both the original hymn and the new, unconventional “non-hymn”. However, the opposition between the two versions is produced through a process of variation and transformation, comparable, for example, to the variations of the finales of Op. 109 or the *Hammerklavier*. As such, although this final version is markedly contrasting this opposition does not create incongruity or objectification.

programmatically – in terms of “hymns”, “strength”, “the Godhead” etc. Moreover, the developmental variation process suggests a type of narrative course, not as a “plot” or “story” but rather an end-based trajectory, clearly “aiming” towards the final transformation of the hymn. Thus, if both the topic and the inscription of the original Adagio evoked “sacred” connotations, the overwhelming power of the final Adagio may be read as being related to this original connotation: it may be that the strength of the convalescent is found in this explicitly religious music. Alternatively one could, following Spandrell in Aldous Huxley’s *Point Counter Point*, consider that this final version is a musical representation of heaven, or of God – “the famous proof of God’s existence”.<sup>77</sup> From this viewpoint this final version of the hymn is perceived as fundamentally different to the other versions, as “other”, or even “external” to them. Within the context of the “sacred” connotations, this could even be considered to represent an external, sacred force – the “Gottheit” of the composer’s inscription.

Such programmatic readings are particularly significant within the context of the objectification of the *Neue Kraft* sections considered above. As has been seen, from its first occurrence the Andante is an “artifice”; its stylised, parodic elements and its incongruities and diversions reduce it to an object of the discourse. The inherent artifice of this Andante, however, may also be understood as an implication that the “New Strength” that its inscription suggests it represents is also an artifice: if the music itself is, in some sense, aesthetically inauthentic then so too is its “meaning”. This objectified “meaning”, however, is contrasted with the climactic force of the final Adagio – the culmination of the development of the entire movement – which appears to be the “real” strength: as Kerman notes, “beside this strength the *Neue Kraft* pales”.<sup>78</sup> This contrast produces the reversal of the movement – the “strength” that is lacking in the Andante is found within the climax of the hymn.

Although such a reversal is, in itself, somewhat ironic it is also important for the interpretation of the overall irony of the quartet that is offered here. The incongruous

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<sup>77</sup> Huxley, Aldous *Point Counter Point* Chatto and Windus, London (1947 edition), p. 594

<sup>78</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 260

juxtapositions of the sections and the parodying and objectification of the Neue Kraft throughout this movement result in a parabasis – the conventions of the Andante are objectified by an ironic authorial presence. Nevertheless, this objectification and the reversal of “meaning” suggested fundamentally affects only one of the two contrasting elements of the movement – the “system” of the Andante. Thus, the ironic elements that result from this objectification are satirical or parodic in nature, rather than constituting specifically Romantic irony. Romantic irony relates not simply to devices of parabasis, but also to artistic consciousness and, above all, the continual paradox of finite “systems” within the infinite universe, the constant alternation of assertion and negation. Here, although there is parabasis and consciousness, there is no Romantic paradox.

This paradox, however, arises within the context of the following movement. The same harmonic movement that linked the two sections of the third movement is employed to establish a relationship between the third and fourth movements: the F lydian of the hymn is transformed into the strongly diatonic A major of the Alla marcia. Moreover, the “floating” quality of the final F lydian tonality of the third movement produces an “open” ending, lacking strong tonal closure.<sup>79</sup> This in itself provokes a relationship between the movements: the fourth movement seems to fill the “gap” left by this vacuum.

This relationship, though, is one of contrariety: Robert Simpson considers that “there is nothing more startling in music than the little Alla marcia that follows [the Heiliger Dankgesang] with such cruelly bland abruptness”.<sup>80</sup> The juxtaposition between the final version of the hymn and this Alla marcia presents exactly the same

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<sup>79</sup> Indeed, the indeterminate end of this movement prompts Chua to ask whether it actually ends at all. He suggests that the lack of tonal resolution at the end (caused again by the opposition between diatonicism and modality) implies an infinite continuation (Chua (1995) p. 151). This intriguing question resonates with the interpretation suggested in the current analysis. On one hand if this passage is an evocation of the divine in music, then this infinite ending surely can be used to represent some external, inhuman (i.e. Godlike) force. More importantly, however, it implies that the objectifying processes of creation and destruction, assertion and negation that dominate this movement are actually themselves infinite. As such, they could, in turn, be considered to correlate with the infinite reflective process of Schlegelian Romantic irony.

<sup>80</sup> Simpson, Robert (1971). *The Chamber Music for Strings*, in Arnold and Fortune (eds.) ‘The Beethoven Companion’ p. 270

type of incongruous juxtaposition as those that occurred within the preceding movement, and those considered by A.W. Schlegel. Regardless of how one reads this final Adagio (whether as an ironic reversal of the “strength” of the Andante, or even a musical evocation of the divine), the juxtaposition of these two movements produces a savage undercutting of the ultra-serious final transformation of the Heiliger Dankgesang by a frankly comic March.

In this juxtaposition is seen the ironic smile with which Huxley’s Mark Rampion responded to the final variation:

They listened, almost holding their breaths. Spandrell looked exultantly at his guest. His own doubts had vanished. How could one fail to believe in something which was there, which manifestly existed? Mark Rampion nodded. ‘Almost thou persuadest me,’ he whispered. ‘But it’s *too* good.’ . . . The lines of mockery came back into his face, the corners of the mouth became once more ironic. ‘There, he’s the demon again,’ thought Rampion. ‘He’s come to life and he’s the demon.’<sup>81</sup>

The effect of this incongruous juxtaposition is profound. At the end of the third movement the final transformation of the hymn appeared to represent, in some sense, an aesthetic “reality”: the Neue Kraft became, in contrast, an ironised object. Programmatically, the strength that was lacking in the Andante, because of the objectification of its aesthetic artifice, appeared to be found in the final, climactic occurrence of the Adagio. However, the juxtaposition of this movement with the Alla marcia demonstrates that, in fact, the “reality” of the hymn was also an artifice: it forces the destruction of the aesthetic illusion, revealing its inherent artifice. The hymn itself, in other words, becomes objectified.

The juxtaposition of these two movements introduces the element of paradox. The final variation of the hymn is transformed from the position of “reality” into an artifice, from being the objectifying element to itself becoming objectified; its assertion is negated, and consequently its apparent authenticity and “strength” becomes objectified. Through this juxtaposition the hymn becomes both objectifier and an objectified artifice, both ironist and the victim of irony, and this “double-image” is fundamentally paradoxical, the root of Romantic irony.

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<sup>81</sup> Huxley (1947) p. 598

## Fourth Movement

The Alla Marcia returns to the metrical play of the second movement – it is essentially a comic movement, whose “joking” surface masks further ironic incongruities and paradoxes. It is, in fact more a collection of juxtaposed fragments than a conventional movement, fragments that are all individually problematic, riven with internal incongruities.<sup>82</sup> The rhythmic structure of the opening Alla marcia is undermined by a device introduced in the opening bar: the second beat is articulated in such a way that it sounds like the first beat. The dotted rhythm and ascending arpeggio across the first two beats (conventional anacrusis gestures) suggest that the first beat is an upbeat, whilst the *sf* articulation and the entry of the three remaining parts produce strong emphasis on the second beat, creating the illusion of a down beat.

Ex. 4.22 Op. 132 4th Movement  
Alla marcia, assai vivace

Violin I  
Violin II  
Viola  
Violoncello

6

*f sf p*  
*f p*  
*f p*  
*f p*  
*cresc.*  
*cresc.*  
*cresc.*  
*cresc.*  
*f*  
*dolce*  
*dolce*  
*dolce*  
*dolce*

<sup>82</sup> It is this fragmentary nature that resists “symmetrical” interpretations of the quartet as a whole. This assemblage of fragments does not “balance” the second movement; rather it links the third movement and finale in a continual ironic process.



10

This musical system contains measures 10 through 13. It features four staves: two treble clefs at the top and two bass clefs at the bottom. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). Measure 10 includes dynamics like *cresc.*, *f*, and *dolce*. Measures 11 and 12 show various melodic lines with slurs and dynamic markings such as *f*, *sf*, and *fz*. Measure 13 concludes the system with a final chord and a fermata over the last note.

This device produces metrical ambiguity: bar one could imply triple time, the dotted rhythms echoing those of the first beat, whilst bar two would be considered a “feminine” cadence. However, these bars could also be re-barréd in duple metre, a solution where the anacrusis of bar 3 thus occurs in the “correct” place:

Ex. 4.23, Op. 132, 4th Movement

Re-barred in triple time

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

*f* *sf* *> p* *f* *> p*

*f* *> p* *f* *> p*

*f* *> p* *f* *> p*

*f* *> p* *f* *> p*

Re-barred in duple time

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

1 2 3 4

The effect of this is a continual shifting of the main beat throughout the section that undermines the rhythmic structure. For example, if these bars are in triple time then there is effectively a beat missing in bar two, the next “anacrusis” coming in the “wrong” place. The upbeat in bar 4, in contrast, appears in the wrong place (regardless of whether duple or triple metre is preferred at this point), whilst the stability of the duple metre in bars 5 to 8 creates a rhythmic jarring with the repeat of the first bar.<sup>83</sup>

These shifts of rhythmic emphasis produce rhythmic collisions at the cadence points in particular. Bar 13 is perhaps the strongest of these. Here the duple metre from bars 9 collides with the false anacrusis on the first beat of this bar. Moreover, the repetition of the anacrusis gesture on each beat of bar 14 creates further rhythmic problems; when bar 15 begins with another anacrusis on the first beat all sense of the “correct” placement of the beat is lost.

Although such rhythmic deception is not uncommon its occurrence within this movement is significant.<sup>84</sup> The dotted rhythms, duple metre and fast tempo of the movement are conventional elements of the march topic suggested by the movement’s title. However the manipulation of the rhythmic structure, particularly the suggestion of triple time in the opening bars, are entirely incongruous with this topic. The incongruity of these rhythmic problems undermines and objectifies the conventions of the march topic, baring the artifice of its “system”. The result is a paradox: an arrhythmic march, a march that cannot be marched to.

The second part of the movement creates further incongruity and objectification. Conventionally, a contrasting section would be expected here; bars 25 and 26 do initially suggest this, both through the new melodic figurations and through the conventional change of mode. However, the sudden change of texture, topic and

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<sup>83</sup> In addition, see Chua’s analysis of this movement, which suggests another possible re-barring (Chua (1995) p. 126-129. The important point is that no one re-barring of this movement is satisfactory: the rhythmic structure points to both duple and triple metres, thus every note is susceptible to at least two possibilities.

<sup>84</sup> Beethoven uses similar devices in the second movement of this quartet, for example, as well as in the Scherzo movement of the quartet Op. 18 number 6. Such devices may also be seen within the music of Haydn, in particular the finale of his Op 76 number 6 quartet.

dynamic in bar 27 is unexpected and incongruous. The recitative topic is entirely incongruous with both the preceding march topic and the two preceding bars, whilst the tremolando accompaniment is incongruous even with the ideal of a string quartet: as Lam states it “debases the quartet medium”.<sup>85</sup>

Ex. 4.24 Op. 132 4th Movement

25 **Piu allegro**

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

31 *in tempo*

37 *immer geschwinder*

**Presto**

<sup>85</sup> Lam (1975) p. 96



To this unexpected juxtaposition of topics several other incongruities are added. The most important of these is that the conventional elements of the incongruous recitative section are themselves exaggerated to the point of melodramatic parody. For example, whilst the temporal manipulations of the expressive *ritardandos* in bars 30 and 36 are perhaps slight exaggerations, the combination of the *accelerando* between bars 36 and 39 with the extreme crescendo (*pp* to *ff*) pushes this exaggeration too far, beyond pathos into bathos. Both Kerman and Lam highlight this effect: for Kerman “there is no getting away from the sheer blatancy of this recitative. It is no dignified Gluckish thing – it sounds more like “rescue opera””;<sup>86</sup> Lam is more emphatic, characterising the section as “savage mockery or feigned tragedy”.<sup>87</sup>

The sudden leap to high F in bar 39 introduces a further incongruous juxtaposition of topics – the opposition of the recitative to a violin cadenza. This cadenza interrupts the exaggerated recitative in the same manner as the recitative interrupted the march. In both cases the incongruity caused by the interruption and juxtaposition of topics produces the same type of objectification and destruction of aesthetic illusion that occurred within the previous movement.<sup>88</sup> Although the juxtaposition of march and

<sup>86</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 262

<sup>87</sup> Lam (1975) p. 96

<sup>88</sup> This interruption of the recitative by the cadenza could also be characterised as an opposition of the essentially “vocal” elements of the recitative with an “instrumental” idiom. Up to this point the melodic line of the recitative had been confined to a vocal register. However, the sudden leap, coming after the exaggerated accumulation of the preceding bars is incongruous: it moves beyond the vocal idiom of the section, introducing a distinctly “instrumental” medium, both through its register and through the explicitly virtuosic writing. From this viewpoint this interruption produces a parallel of

recitative initially objectifies the march section, the subsequent interruption of this topic by the cadenza also produces this effect: there is a “chain” of objectification, each topic first objectifying, then being objectified.

In addition to the incongruities that thus arise “between” the topics in this movement, however, the incongruities in both of the sections – the exaggerated, parodic effects, metrical incongruities that undermine the dance topic, and oppositions of vocal and instrumental idioms – foreground and undermine the conventions of the individual sections from within. This effectively produces two objectifying processes within this movement, exposing the artifice of both of its sections.

Thus, whereas the fourth movement initially objectified the third movement through its incongruous juxtaposition, it is itself an objectified artifice, riven with incongruities. The effect of this is vital: the objectification of this movement creates a Romantic paradox. Each element of the two movements – the hymn, the *Neue Kraft*, the march and the recitative – undergoes the same process. Each one causes, by juxtaposition, the objectification of one of the other structures, before subsequently becoming the object of such a process; each section is thus both an aesthetic “reality” and, at the same time an “artifice”. The incongruities and reversals within the movements add to this objectification, undermining each from within. This produces, throughout, a continual process of assertion and negation, creation and destruction, a paradoxical situation created by the intrusion of an ironic authorial presence.

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the same opposition seen between the *Heiliger Dankgesang* and the *Neue Kraft* in the previous movement.



Finale

Although the *attacca* between the fourth and fifth movements alone establishes a clear relationship between them, the descending semitone F – E also echoes that of the last bar of the fourth movement, whilst the A minor harmony resolves its final dominant chord. These purely musical connections, however, highlight a connection with the ironic procedures of the previous movement(s). This finale is not an answer to, or resolution of the problems of these movements, however; rather it is a continuation of the irony of these movements, intrinsically and significantly linked with the preceding ironic context and displaying some of the same devices. For example, the rhythmic manipulation seen in the second and fourth movements is suggested by the elements of cross-rhythm within the opening bars. The accented second beats of the viola and second violin in the first two bars conflict with the first-beat emphasis of the cello.

Ex. 4.25, Op. 132, Finale

V

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

44

Poco adagio

Allegro appassionato

smorz.

p

attacca

p

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

cresc.

cresc.

cresc.

cresc.

p

p

p

p

10

p

p

p

Since it occurs at the beginning of the movement the effect of this rhythmic interaction is more pronounced, unsettling the main theme of the movement somewhat: when this theme commences in the third bar the rhythms of inner and outer parts are not quite synchronised. There is therefore (as so often in the middle movements) a certain duality within this theme, an apparent simplicity complicated by its accompaniment. Nevertheless, despite this momentary rhythmic uncertainty, the unassuming, conventional rondo-type theme of this sonata-rondo movement, once established, appears to be the least problematic of all the movements. Indeed, the manner in which the exposition of this movement proceeds seems to confirm this. The first subject area (to bar 48) is entirely conventional, remaining firmly in the tonic, with symmetrical, antecedent-consequent periodicity. This is underlined by the repetition first of the eight-bar theme, then the contrasting theme and finally the clear, quasi-dramatic cadential repetitions of bars 34 to 42.

The modulation to G major at bar 50 that begins the second subject, however, introduces the first incongruous element in the movement. The manner in which this modulation is achieved is too conventional: the cadence sounds like a trite, textbook modulation. This too-simple cadence is combined with the sequence that is itself too simple and conventional, finishing on an imperfect cadence after rhythmic diminution and hemiola. The combined effect of these simple movements is almost comical when compared to the complex rhythmic interactions and “serious” topic of the preceding rondo theme; this contrast, together with the exaggerated simplicity tends to give these bars a somewhat parodic effect. Whilst within another context

these parodic elements would not be particularly problematic, the context of the previous movements tends to magnify such incongruities, imbuing them with added significance. In effect they iterate the irony that occurs throughout the quartet.

Ex. 4.26, Op. 132, Finale

42

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

*f* *p f* *p f* *sf*

*f* *p f* *p f* *sf*

*f* *p f* *p f* *sf*

*p* *p f* *sf*

50

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*p* *p* *p* *p*

60

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*p* *p* *p* *p*

*cresc.* *cresc.* *cresc.* *cresc.*

The image shows a musical score for four instruments: Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), and Cello (Vc.). The score covers measures 68, 69, and 70. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The time signature is not explicitly shown but appears to be 4/4. The score is characterized by complex rhythmic patterns, including syncopations and repeated emphasis on the third beat. Dynamic markings include *f* (forte), *sf* (sforzando), and *p* (piano). The Violin I part has a melodic line with many accents. The Violin II part has a more rhythmic, chordal texture. The Viola and Cello parts provide a harmonic and rhythmic foundation, with the Cello often playing a steady eighth-note pattern.

The second part of this first episode returns to the “serioso” topic of the main theme in bar 59, but expands the elements of rhythmic manipulation. The syncopations from bar 63, for example, relate to the cross-rhythm of the first theme. The repeated emphasis on the third beat in these bars undermines the rhythm, effectively shifting these bars a beat early, resulting in momentary rhythmic uncertainty in bars 68 and 69. The process is repeated between bars 71 and 78, before the hemiola-like transition back to the tonic in bars 82 to 89 adds a final rhythmic distortion.

The incongruity created by the second episode, however, is of far greater significance. The final cadence of the first return of the theme is interrupted in bar 123 by a sudden, unexpected change from A minor to F major, underscored by the accents and block-chord texture. The section that follows this intrusion is constructed from a complex of cross-rhythms. Although the phrasing in the first violin produces, in places, a quasi-6/8 metre, the *sf* accents, matched by the cello highlight the 2<sup>nd</sup> beat of the bar. The second violin, in contrast, accents the second and fifth quavers, whilst the viola stresses the fourth quaver. The combined effect of these conflicting accents is that none of the parts appears to be rhythmically related to any of the others. This results in the apparent disintegration of the ensemble into a chaotic rhythmic fragmentation. Moreover, although the section is in C major the dissonances that occur (for example, the tritones produced by the appoggiatura figures in the violins in bars 125/6) tend to add greater harshness to the chaotic effect of the arrhythmic context, loud dynamic levels and *sf* accents.

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system covers measures 120 to 125, and the second system covers measures 126 to 130. The instruments are Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score includes various dynamic markings such as *rf* (ritardando forte), *f* (forte), *sf* (sforzando), and *fz* (forzando). The notation includes slurs, ties, and various rhythmic values like eighth and sixteenth notes.

There are moments of greater tonal/rhythmic stability in this episode, such as the pedal C that, from bar 132, grounds the tonality and realigns the instruments rhythmically. Nevertheless, the chaotic effect of the previous passage continues through the remainder of this developmental episode. Bar 144, for example, returns to the violence and fragmentation of the beginning of the episode following the more lucid harmonic motion of the descending bass in the previous bars.<sup>89</sup> The same complex of competing rhythmic accents is produced, with the part-writing of the earlier occurrence inverted (the *sf* chords on the second beat, for example, now occur in the first violin, the 6/8 rhythm in the cello).

<sup>89</sup> Although the first violin essentially outlines a descending C major scale (with appoggiaturas) in these bars, the fact that, in bar 136, the tonality is diverted from the expected C major, together with the chromatic descent in the second violin and viola and the lack of a true bass means that this tonal function is obscured.



132

Violin I *dim.* *p* *piu* *pp*

Violin II *dim.* *p* *piu* *p* *pp*

Viola *dim.* *p* *piu* *p* *pp*

Cello *dim.* *p* *piu* *p*

140

Vln. I *cresc.* *f*

Vln. II *cresc.* *f*

Vla. *cresc.* *f*

Vc. *pp* *cresc.* *f*

150

Vln. I *sf* *sf* *sf* *sf* *sf* *f*

Vln. II *f*

Vla. *f*

Vc. *sf* *sf* *sf* *f* *sf* *sf*

The musical score consists of two systems of staves. The first system covers bars 144 to 156, and the second system covers bars 157 to 159. The instruments are Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The notation includes various dynamic markings such as *sf*, *f*, *dim.*, *p*, and *piu p*. The rhythm is complex, with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

Although the repetition of the rhythm of bar 144 every four bars produces a clearer rhythmic structure, this is countered by an increased occurrence of dissonance, predominantly tritones, between the middle and lower parts. Many of these fulfil appoggiatura functions, but the manner in which they succeed each other obscures this. In bar 145, for example the G dominant 7<sup>th</sup> on beat 2 is immediately followed by tritones C#-G and E-A#. Similarly, the function of the commonplace dominant and diminished 7<sup>ths</sup> in bars 144, 148, 152 and 156 is obscured by the inversions chosen, which highlights their dissonances. The cumulative effect of this increased dissonance and tonal disturbance with the rhythmic fragmentation, the extremes of dynamic and register and the angular *sf* accents again produces the effect of a violent chaos. The entire episode from bars 123 to 159 may therefore be understood as a fragmented, tonally uncertain disruption, whose destructive energy defies attempts to assert tonal or rhythmic order.

Although the interruptions in this episode are incongruous, nevertheless the fragmentation and chaos of this section is actually implicit in the main theme of the

movement itself. The fragmentation of the rhythmic relationships within this section might be taken as an expansion of the conflict between the apparent simplicity of the theme itself and the cross-rhythms of the accompaniment, to the point where the complex of different accents destroys the ensemble. This relationship between the main theme and this episode could be understood as a reflective gesture: as the movement expands it actually destroys itself, the reflective drive destroying the assertion of the main theme, producing a process of self-creation and self-destruction.

The expansion of the metrical problems of the theme into the rhythmic chaos of the episode, however, also disturbs the return of that very theme.<sup>90</sup> The recapitulation is problematic from its beginning. Bars 160 to 167 dissipate the rhythmic energy of the previous bars, steering towards a return of the theme in D minor via a quasi-rhetorical pause on diminished harmony (subsequently reinterpreted as A dominant 7<sup>th</sup>). The subsequent return of the theme, however, is fragmented in nature: the first two bars are simply passed between the violins, producing the effect of thematic fragmentation rather than recapitulation.

It is here that the disruptive, violent effect of the preceding episode is seen most clearly. The destruction in that section produces a “developmental” effect in these bars, which obscures the return of the theme in the tonic at bar 176.<sup>91</sup> There is no easy thematic return in this recapitulation, no strong resolution onto the tonic to announce its presence – it doesn’t *sound* like a recapitulation. Rather, it begins with a struggle to reassert the theme following the preceding episode: it is only around bar 180 that the functional ambiguity of these bars is resolved, the theme emerges re-established and the recapitulation begins.

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<sup>90</sup> From this viewpoint there is a certain parallel between the problems of the recapitulation in this movement and those of the first movement. In the first movement the formal paradox of “false” and “correct” recapitulations arose from separation of thematic and harmonic levels that first arose in the exposition. Here the incongruities within the recapitulation derive from an expansion of those within the main theme itself. The parallel continues in that both movements also have problematic turns to the tonic major, and codas that produce parabasis and objectification.

<sup>91</sup> This is compounded by the redistribution of the part-writing and the new textural additions in the accompaniment, which prevent the return from sounding too familiar, again producing a developmental effect.

The musical score is divided into three systems, each containing four staves for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello.

**System 1 (Measures 164-169):**

- Violin I:** Starts at measure 164 with a *pp* dynamic. It features a melodic line with a *pp* dynamic in measure 165 and a *espress.* dynamic in measure 166.
- Violin II:** Starts at measure 164 with a *pp* dynamic. It features a *espress.* dynamic in measure 166.
- Viola:** Starts at measure 164 with a *pp* dynamic.
- Cello:** Starts at measure 164 with a *pp* dynamic.

**System 2 (Measures 170-175):**

- Vln. I:** Starts at measure 170 with a *espress.* dynamic. It features a *cresc.* dynamic in measure 172.
- Vln. II:** Starts at measure 170 with a *espress.* dynamic. It features a *cresc.* dynamic in measure 172.
- Vla.:** Starts at measure 170 with a *cresc.* dynamic in measure 172.
- Vc.:** Starts at measure 170 with a *cresc.* dynamic in measure 172.

**System 3 (Measures 176-181):**

- Vln. I:** Starts at measure 176 with a *p* dynamic. It features a *cresc.* dynamic in measure 178.
- Vln. II:** Starts at measure 176 with a *p* dynamic. It features a *cresc.* dynamic in measure 178.
- Vla.:** Starts at measure 176 with a *p* dynamic. It features a *cresc.* dynamic in measure 178.
- Vc.:** Starts at measure 176 with a *p* dynamic. It features a *cresc.* dynamic in measure 178.

The problems of the beginning of the recapitulation are, however, also reflected in its somewhat truncated proportions. Bar 176 corresponds not to the first statement of the theme, but rather to the second in bar 11, albeit altered. A corresponding section (bars 19 to 26) is also missing from the recapitulation of the consequent phrase, presumably in order to maintain a balance between the phrases. Finally, the re-transition to the contrasting major section is also shortened. This recapitulation is

thus not a literal repeat, but rather an incomplete, problematic reassertion of the first theme.

It is the coda, however, that produces the most obvious irony of the movement, an irony that is related to that of the first movement. It provides the moments of greatest incongruity, metrical manipulations, incongruous juxtapositions and interruptions, meaningless repetition and moments of disruptive parabasis that parallel those of the first movement. It begins in bar 243, with a fugato built from the final figure of the recapitulation. Into this the main theme gradually insinuates itself, the first two bars of the theme appearing in counterpoint with themselves.

Ex. 4.30, Op. 132, Finale

244

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

250

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

The *accelerando* that begins in bar 271, however, is “distressing as well as unexpected”,<sup>92</sup> producing an accumulation of rhythmic/dynamic momentum, with some destabilising of the rhythm and momentary blurring between 6/8 and 3/4

<sup>92</sup> Lam (1975) p. 98



metres. Combined with the twelve-fold occurrence of the semitone F-E in the first violin, this produces an exaggerated effect, “an intensity on the verge of hysteria”.<sup>93</sup>

Ex. 4.31, Op. 132, Finale

The musical score for Ex. 4.31, Op. 132, Finale, is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 270-275) shows a gradual increase in intensity with markings '(cresc. poco a poco)' and 'accel.'. The second system (measures 280-285) is marked 'Presto' and features a rapid, repetitive melodic pattern in the Violin I part, with dynamic markings 'f' and 'sf'. The third system (measures 286-291) continues this pattern, with the Violin I part playing a series of sixteenth notes and the other instruments providing a rhythmic accompaniment.

Significantly, the effect of these bars is to establish an opposition between the “learned style” of the fugato and the “madness” of the exaggerated accumulation of

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. p. 98

the *accelerando*. This opposition occurs not so much as a juxtaposition of topics, but rather as a transition, with the distressing, hysterical bars developing from the fugato. The incongruity produces a paradoxical reversal: the “learned” and the “insane” are brought into relationship.

The incongruity of this passage, however, is surpassed by that of the sudden change to the tonic major at the apex of the Presto version of the theme that follows the *accelerando* (bar 294 onwards). This apparent attempt at an extended Picardy close parallels the second recapitulation of the first movement, but here, the change produces a greater incongruity by interrupting and diverting this Presto version. Moreover, although a Picardy close is a fairly conventional procedure within a minor work, it is entirely unwarranted, both within the context of this movement as well as within that of the entire quartet: it is too conventional, too obvious to bring closure to the fragmented, ironic work that precedes it.

The incongruity of this moment thus tends to objectify the coda from its beginning: the strange, unexpected change in tone is a parabasis effect, undercutting the “serioso” context of the movement. More importantly, however, the coda is seriously undermined and objectified by incongruities within its structure. The most obvious occurs in bar 320 where, in place of the expected A major there is a rest on the first beat that momentarily interrupts the flow of the music. Though small, this rest has a profound effect, effectively moving the main beat of the next 16 bars from the first beat to the second: following the resumption of the cadence on the second beat of bar 320 the whole section is, as it were, shifted over one beat.<sup>94</sup> The effect of this is revealed in bar 336, where the “felt” metre of bars 320 to 335 collides with the “normal” metre of bar 336, thereby highlighting the rhythmic problems caused by the earlier rest:

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<sup>94</sup> The pizzicato chords on beat 2 of bars 322 and 324, together with the entries on that beat in bars 324 and 326 maintain the illusion of the strong beat. This passage is analogous to the central section of the trio in the second movement. There are also analogous moments in the first movement: the “undercutting” in bar 223, for example.

[illegible]

340

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*f* *sf* *sf* *sf* *dim.*

*f* *sf* *sf* *sf* *dim.*

*f* *sf* *sf* *sf* *dim.*

*f* *sf* *sf* *sf* *dim.*

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*p* *piu p* *pp* *cresc.*

*p* *piu p* *pp* *cresc.*

*p* *piu p* *pp* *cresc.*

*p* *piu p* *pp* *cresc.*

350

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*f* *fp dolce*

*f* *fp*

*f* *fp*

*f* *fp*

The incongruity of this passage is augmented by the exaggerated simplicity of the cadential motion from bar 328. This section is built from simple block harmony and conventional scale figures, with repetitions that, because of the simplicity of the material tend to sound extraneous. Indeed, the over-simplicity of this passage tends to produce a parodic quality: in the context of the movement these too-simple coda figurations sound somewhat naïve and inauthentic.

The incongruity of this entire section, however, is also highlighted by the interesting chromatic inflection in bars 339 to 343. The D minor harmony of bar 339 and the F naturals in the first violin in the two bars following hearken back to the minor key of the movement, as though the change to the tonic major has been momentarily forgotten. This effect is made all the more obvious by the “correction” to F# that occurs in 342/343, and by the distortion of the periodicity that results from the insertion of these two corrective bars. In context these details become important, a reminder of the incongruity of the major key of the coda.

These incongruities, particularly the rest in bar 320, are clear instances of authorial parabasis, an intrusion into the work from “outside” that destroys the illusion of the coda – its conventionality. This moment of parabasis, in itself, could perhaps prompt an ironic interpretation, but the obviousness of the moment serves to highlight the inherent problems and authorial manipulation of a coda that is, from its beginning, unconvincing and incongruous.

In addition to the complex of incongruities within this coda, however, there is also an unnecessary accumulation of conventional closural procedures. The *accelerando* and subsequent *Presto* tempo that begin the coda are conventional procedures, with precedents in Beethoven’s own earlier works as well as in Haydn.<sup>95</sup> However, to this convention is subsequently added another conventional coda procedure – the change to the tonic major. The fact that these conventions happen consecutively, 24 bars apart, rather than simultaneously, produces the effect of an incongruous accretion of coda procedures: the Picardy close seems surplus to requirements. This problematic use of both coda conventions, in other words, entirely undermines the coda, underlining the fundamentally inauthentic nature of the transition to A major.

This accumulation is taken to a final stage in bar 351, where the dominant is interrupted by a repeat of the material from bar 303. From there the major section of

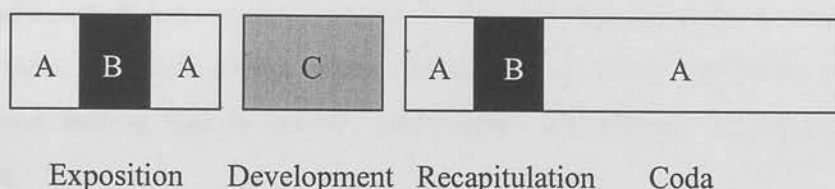
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<sup>95</sup> See, for example the change of tempo at the end of the finales of Haydn’s Op. 33 no. 5 quartet and Beethoven’s Op. 18 no. 6.



the coda is repeated in its entirety, largely unchanged from the first occurrence (except for some fuller textures, with new doublings and some re-distribution of parts). Significantly, this repeat even includes the incongruous rest from bar 320, producing the same shift in pulse, which results in the same rhythmic clashes and “correction” of F natural to F#.96

Although this doubling of the coda produces the same “surface” incongruities, it also introduces an important structural incongruity. The movement falls broadly into a sonata-rondo form:



The repetition in the coda, however, distorts the overall dimensions of this form: even if the Presto section (rather than the fugato) is taken as the beginning of the coda it is still 124 bars long – nearly a third of the movement. This could be considered to be a “balance” for the whole quartet, an extended major coda needed to counteract the fragmented, troubled movements that precede it. However, the fact that this “extended” coda is simply a two-fold repetition of the same material precludes such conventional explanations. This repetition actually produces formal oddity: it is not a long coda, but a shorter one played twice. It is almost entirely redundant, an unnecessary, incongruous replication where the “jokes” – the misplaced beats, clichés etc. – are literally told twice. As such not only does this repeated section become virtually meaningless, verging on banal, but more importantly the comic effect of the “jokes” is lost. Instead, these devices themselves become objectified: the incongruity of this repetition draws attention to the “device” of these jokes – in effect it exposes their illusion. In so doing it raises their effect, as it were, to the second power. They become not simply humorous incongruities, but

<sup>96</sup> It is worth noting that the incongruity of the F natural – F# motion is actually highlighted by the changed texture: the increased dissonances with the accompaniment in bars 389-391 foregrounds the play of major and minor tonalities.

rather, they themselves are objectified, subjected to the ironic comment of an intrusive artistic presence. This results in a reflective function: the ironising of these negations produces a paradoxical double-negative effect.

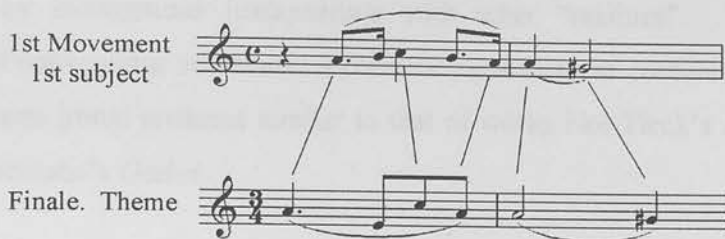
The incongruities of this repetition thus add a final layer to the accumulation of incongruities – the accumulation of irony – seen throughout the coda. Within this context even the emphatic final cadence, which in another context would have been unremarkable, seems problematic: the ironising of conventional coda procedure that has preceded it undermines its assertion of closure. It is too emphatic: it simply sounds too neat, too conventional, particularly for the quartet that has preceded it. Thus, although it *is* an ending it seems to play with this certainty, to produce a final ironic twist; this coda closes the movement with an ironic half-smile, a seemingly innocuous ending that is entirely undermined and entirely inappropriate for its context.

\* \* \*

This quartet, as several commentators have noted, is a work that, despite its fragmentation and obvious oppositional nature, seems to project a particular air of wholeness or coherence – a peculiar balance of unity and disunity (to borrow Kerman's terms).<sup>97</sup> This balance may be sought, and to an extent found, in purely musical occurrences: one thinks of the reminiscence of the opening bars in the *Heiliger Dankgesang*, or of the cadenza in the fourth movement that recalls those of the first movement. On a deeper level, there are suggestions of symmetry between the five-part structure of the whole and that of the third movement, and explicit thematic connections, for example between the themes of the first movement and the last movement:

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<sup>97</sup> See, for example, Kerman (1967) p. 267 and Chua (1995) p. 161/162



Perhaps, above all, such connections may be seen in the manner in which the four-note motif can be traced through much of the thematic structure, not only of the first movement, but also subsequent movements.<sup>98</sup>

Such instances have led some commentators, like Kerman, to relate it to one underlying concept – to pain, or some psychological progression.<sup>99</sup> This analysis likewise relates all the movements of this work to an underlying concept – Romantic irony. These movements are joined together, not only by the type of connections mentioned above, but also by common ironic processes. Incongruous rhythmic manipulations, for example, run throughout the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> movements, whilst problematic, incongruous codas link the first and last movements. Similarly, elements of self-reflexivity, whether explicitly as quotation (not to mention inscriptions), or obliquely, as a foregrounding of the thematic procedures of Beethoven's own "middle-period" works link 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> movements. Finally, emphases on "meaningless" or banal music occur in several movements, together with frequent elements of parody and cliché.

More importantly, throughout this work there is a continual fragmentation of the surface of the music through constant juxtapositions and incongruities. These juxtapositions alone demonstrate an ironic, manipulating authorial consciousness; they are compounded, though, by the recurrence of sudden, explicit intrusions of a destructive authorial voice. Together these produce a repeated destruction of illusion, an undermining and objectification of every aesthetic "reality" that is

<sup>98</sup> See, for example, Chua's demonstration that the motifs of the first movement may be seen transformed through those of the rest of the quartet. (Chua (1995) p. 152-160)

<sup>99</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 242/243

presented by incongruous juxtaposition with other “realities”. This recurring violation of conventions constitutes a constant parabasis, the continual manipulation of a conscious ironic presence similar to that of works like Tieck’s *Der Gestiefelte Kater* or Brentano’s *Godwi*.

The continual destruction of illusion that results from this parabasis produces within each movement a paradoxical position of constant antithesis and contradiction, a continual paradox of assertion and negation. The continual progression from objectifier to objectified, from “reality” to artifice throughout the work, together with the formal paradoxes and reversals that occur on the deepest levels of the music, imply an infinite paradox. They produce an infinite alternation of creation and destruction, a Fichtean reflective movement between finite and infinite like an unending reflection between two mirrors. In other words, the paradoxes that lie at the heart of this work locate it within the locus of Schlegel’s Romantic irony: it may be understood in terms of all of the elements considered above – paradox, consciousness and parabasis. It is a striking and powerful instance of musical irony, the objectifying and ironising of all “systems” from the infinite, free viewpoint of an ironic composer.

## Paradox, Fugue and Song

Irony *sensu eminentiori* [in the eminent sense] is directed not against this or that particular existing but against the entire given actuality at a certain time and under certain conditions . . . It is not this or that phenomenon but the totality of existence that it contemplates *sub specie ironiae*.<sup>1</sup>

Kierkegaard

The Cavatina from Beethoven's Op. 130 quartet and the Grosse Fuge, its original finale, present ironic structures that are somewhat different from those seen in Op. 132. The incongruous juxtapositions, parabasis and reversals produced, throughout the work, a continual paradoxical movement from objectifier to objectified, from assertion to negation, from creation to destruction. Crucially, the juxtaposed elements of each section were themselves internally incongruous. The two movements from Op. 130, however, produce "balanced" structures, comprising extreme juxtapositions of internally congruent elements, without the type of internal incongruities and parabasis seen above. Throughout this chapter these balanced structures will be considered to correlate with paradox as paradoxical *forms*. As such, these paradoxical structures will be correlated with a type of irony – known variously as "general", "Socratic" or "existential" irony – in which the totality of existence is perceived as fundamentally paradoxical. These movements will therefore be understood as eloquent statements of general irony.

The harmonic ambiguity that begins the Cavatina has significant consequences for the whole movement. The bass motion across this opening bar outlines a cadential "fifths" motion: after the first E flat chord, the dominant seventh on C briefly implies F major (the dominant of the actual dominant of the movement (B flat)). However, F minor occurs instead, before the move to B flat and the resolution to the tonic in the second bar. The occurrence of such a common progression in the first bar of the movement creates an unusual tonal ambiguity, obscuring the function of the first chord: the E flat chord doesn't "sound" like the tonic, rather it tends to function

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<sup>1</sup> Kierkegaard (1841) p. 254



momentarily as the subdominant of B flat. This ambiguity is intensified by the entry of the melody on the third beat, which produces an anacrusis effect across the whole bar. The combined effect is striking. The harmonic progression of the first bar functions as a process of modulation; such a modulatory process implies a progression from a musical “somewhere” towards a goal. In this case though, the “somewhere” is missing, producing both an “open” harmonic and, by extension, semantic structure at the beginning of the movement.

Ex. 5.1 Op. 130 5th Movement

Cavatina  
Adagio molto espressivo  
*sotto voce*

The musical score is for the 5th movement of Op. 130, Cavatina, Adagio molto espressivo, *sotto voce*. It is written for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The time signature is 3/4. The score shows measures 8 through 13. The first system (measures 8-12) features a melody in the Violin I part, with the other instruments providing harmonic support. The second system (measures 13-17) shows a crescendo in the Violoncello part, with the other instruments also contributing to the harmonic texture. The score includes dynamics such as *p* (piano) and *cresc.* (crescendo).

The ambiguity of these bars may be understood as a “functional ambiguity”, the type that William Thomson considers as an essential aesthetic force, where a composer is

deliberately ambiguous for an aesthetic end.<sup>2</sup> In this case, as will be seen, the ambiguity is crucial to the development and the “meaning” of the movement: paradoxically, the return of this opening at bar 49 joins together the two incongruous structures that comprise this movement.

The main body of the movement – the Cavatina section – is particularly simple. Essentially, it is a song-like texture, as befits a “cavatina”: the melody is confined to the first violin, whilst the remaining parts fulfil mainly a harmonic role, in a predominantly homophonic texture. The melody itself is largely conjunct and confined to a vocal register that corresponds roughly to a mezzo soprano range, avoiding extremes of either pitch or dynamic. The harmonic structure is predominantly major which, together with the slow tempo, restrained dynamics and the conjunct motion of both melody and accompaniment produces a pastoral connotation.

Formally the movement initially appears just as simple. The repetition of the antecedent phrase of the theme leads, via simple modulatory motion, to a contrasting section from around bar 20. The cadential-type material of the bars 23 to 30 is then itself repeated, extending the section to bar 39 and producing an overall symmetry to the movement’s periodicity. However, it is important to note the thematic links that underlie the entire Cavatina. Much of the movement may be derived directly from the opening 10 bars: for example, the contrasting section is derived from a repeat of the consequent phrase of the theme (compare bars 20/21 with 5/6). More importantly the material from the opening bar reappears in key places: in bar 10 it links the two statements of the main theme together;<sup>3</sup> the quaver motion in bars 17 to 21 is derived from that of the opening bar, and its use in the fifths progression in bars 17 to 19 perhaps underlines the initial function. This material therefore plays a

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<sup>2</sup> Thomson, William (1983) “Functional Ambiguity in Musical Structures” *Music Perception* vol. 1 p. 3. Such ambiguities will be discussed more fully in the final chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Although the two lower parts do not play the same material as the opening bar the repetition in the upper two parts ensures the effect of repetition. Crucially, however, the absence of the harmonic motion in these bars heightens the effect of the return of this material in bar 49. The significance of this will be considered below.

crucial role throughout the main part of the movement: it helps to produce an overall effect of a tight thematic and gestural integration, which Dahlhaus describes as “a dense mesh of motivic associations, with a degree of complication that merits the term labyrinthine”.<sup>4</sup>

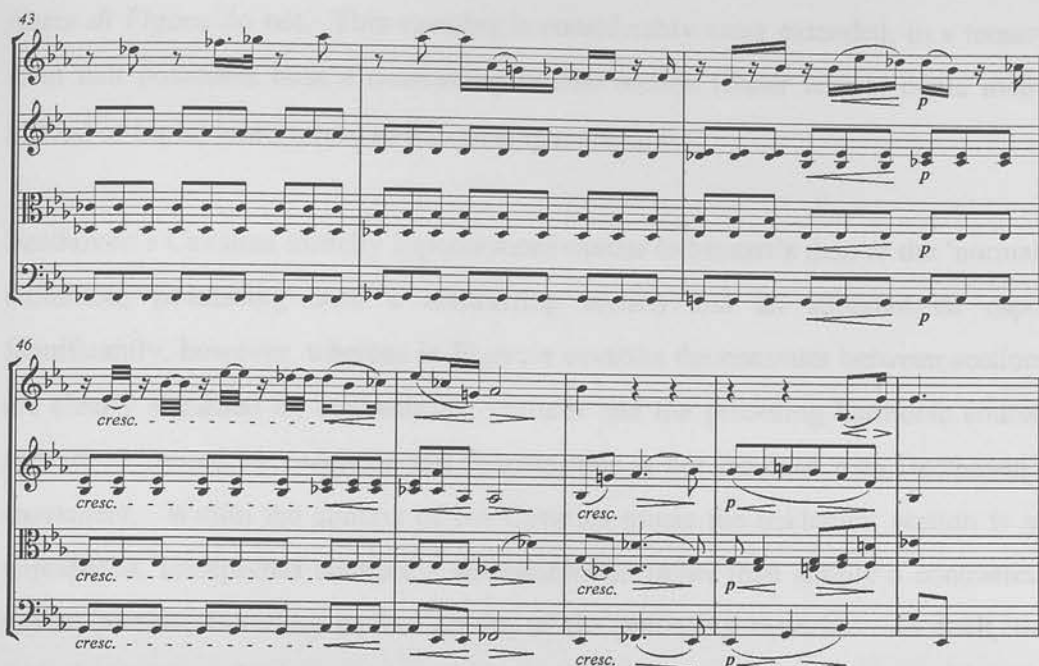
In this context the arrival of the *beklemmt* section in bar 40 produces a striking incongruity, perhaps one of the greatest in any of Beethoven's quartets. The oppressed, agitated music of the *beklemmt* recitative seems calculatedly opposed to the pastoral lyricism of the Cavatina aria, forming significant oppositions on each of the basic musical parameters. The C flat major/A flat minor tonality, for example, is remote from the B flat tonality of the first section, also producing an opposition of major and minor (despite the mediating effect of the C flat major beginning). Likewise, the triplet-pattern of the accompaniment of the *beklemmt* is incongruous with the surrounding duplet figuration, and although the accompaniments of both sections are homophonic, the block chords of the *beklemmt* evoke recitative, rather than the voice-led, arioso-like accompaniment of the Cavatina. Finally, the extremely disjunct, fragmentary nature of the melodic line, which achieves an almost syncopated effect, is opposed to the lyricism of the Cavatina. Moreover, the fact that this melody violates the ‘norms’ of melodic writing produces a particularly incongruous effect: it is this above all that produces the designation of “*beklemmt*”.

Ex. 5.2 Op. 130 5th Movement  
(Adagio molto espressivo)

Violin I  
Violin II  
Viola  
Violoncello

*beklemmt*  
*pp*  
*sempre pp*

<sup>4</sup> Dahlhaus (1991) p. 234



Crucially, the opposition of these sections/topics is heightened by the fact that there is no transition between them – a transition section would have lessened the contrast. Rather the sudden change of texture, metre and key of the *beklemmt* occurs entirely unexpectedly as an *interruption* – an abrupt, incongruous juxtaposition of incongruous elements, foreign to the surrounding Cavatina sections.

The unusual formal structure and proportions of this movement strengthen the designation of the *beklemmt* section as an interruption. According to the Grove Dictionary a cavatina is “a short aria, without da capo, which may occur as an independent piece or as an interpolation in a recitative”;<sup>5</sup> Koch’s *Musikalisches Lexicon* adds that cavatinas should have no second section.<sup>6</sup> Musical forms, however, seldom conform to dictionary definitions: whilst some, like Haydn’s cavatina ‘Licht und Leben’ from *Die Jahreszeiten* (1799-1800), do conform to this definition exactly,<sup>7</sup> others, like the cavatina ‘Se vuol ballare’ from Act One of *Le*

<sup>5</sup> Westrup, Jack (2001) “Cavatina”, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* ed. Stanley Sadie, vol. 5

<sup>6</sup> Koch, Heinrich (1865) *Musikalisches Lexicon* p. 147

<sup>7</sup> Other ‘conventional’ examples include Weber’s ‘Glocklein im Thale’ from *Euryanthe* (1823) and ‘Porgi amor’ and L’ho perduta’ from Mozart’s *Le Nozze di Figaro* (1786).

*Nozze di Figaro* do not. This cavatina is considerably more extended, in a ternary form that possesses both a contrasting second section (faster tempo, duple metre instead of triple) and a return to the opening material.<sup>8</sup>

Beethoven's Cavatina initially appears more similar to Mozart's than to the 'normal' definition, possessing both a contrasting section and an apparent da capo. Significantly, however, whereas in Figaro's cavatina the contrasts between sections are clearly signalled by conventional gestures and the preceding harmonic course, and are delimited by cadences and fermata, this is not the case with Beethoven's movement. Within the context of the Cavatina music the beklemmt section is an unprepared, unexpected contrast – an interruption rather than simply a contrasting formal section, intruding on the course of the preceding material. As such, the formal structure of this movement is unconventional, even incongruous within the stylistic context suggested by its title: the dramatic interruption of the Cavatina by the beklemmt is unprecedented in both earlier and contemporary uses of the 'cavatina' designation. This stylistic incongruity is furthered by the manner in which this insertion forces the occurrence of the final 'da capo' section: it is necessary to "answer" the beklemmt, but this da capo is itself incongruous with the stylistic conventions of the form.

It is possible to explain this unconventional form in more conventional terms: Hatten considers it a hybrid of formal schemes and techniques, a blend of "aria, part form and sonata",<sup>9</sup> whilst Kerman, stressing its "vocality", styles it as a "long, loose ternary song occasionally disturbed by declamatory pressures".<sup>10</sup> However, as Chua states, attempts to "neutralise and unify" the Cavatina "simply miss the point":<sup>11</sup> the

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<sup>8</sup> Likewise, Weber's 'Und ob die Wolke sie verhüle' from *Der Freischütz* (1821), though smaller in scale, also has a ternary construction, though without word-repetition in the final section.

<sup>9</sup> Hatten (1994) p. 210

<sup>10</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 196

<sup>11</sup> Chua (1995) p. 194. Indeed, Chua characterises the beklemmt as an "insertion", an intertextual reference to the slow movement of the Piano Sonata Op. 110 (ibid). Similarly, Dahlhaus describes these two contrasting elements as "different styles that co-exist in the movement" (Dahlhaus (1991) p. 235).



Cavatina contains an enforced contrast, a contradiction arising from the insertion and interruption of the beklemmt music.

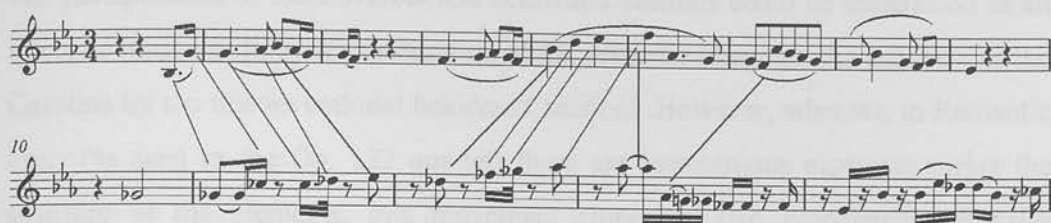
The ending of the beklemmt section compounds its problems. The E flat major that functions as the dominant of A flat minor in bars 46 to 48 is transformed into the tonic via the return of the opening modulatory gesture, followed by a repeat of the Cavatina.<sup>12</sup> The effect of this upon the movement is profound. The recurrence of the modulatory bar establishes an important connection with the first occurrence. However, the context of the second occurrence affects the first occurrence retrospectively, provoking a reassessment of it. The recurrence of this phrase solves the problem of the opening bar by “resolving” its initial harmonic ambiguity – it is almost as if the beklemmt section is “missing” from the opening.

Crucially, the return of these bars therefore establishes a transition between two topics that were initially incongruous: the return of the modulatory process actually elides the beklemmt and the Cavatina. Although the beklemmt interruption forces a contradiction, the two incongruous sections are nevertheless linked. This is achieved primarily through the harmonic process described, but the effect is strengthened by the thematic resemblance between the fractured melodic line of the beklemmt section and the opening theme of the Cavatina:<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See ex. 5.2 above. Note, however, that this return of the opening gesture is not absolutely exact. There is a displacement of the bass, which now outlines an E flat triad. However, the E flat – E natural – F motion still occurs (in the viola), with the same momentary C dominant 7<sup>th</sup> harmony leading to F minor (over a B flat) and B flat. Thus, although the “fifths” motion is weaker, the basic harmony is still present, and the (almost) exact repeat of the second violin line makes the return obvious.

<sup>13</sup> Indeed, both Hatten and Kerman suggest that the similarity between the themes indicates a variation process. Kerman considers the beklemmt theme “a sort of variation of the principal tune” (Kerman (1967) p. 198) whilst Hatten characterises the entire movement as a “developing variation” form (Hatten (1994) p. 208).



This process therefore establishes a type of “circular” or “cyclical” formal and harmonic procedure – the beginning of the movement is linked, by implication, to the end of the beklemmt in a continual, infinite process, a significant cyclical motion of crisis and resolution. Although on one hand the incongruity of the beklemmt section appears to resolve through the recapitulation of the opening music, this process actually produces a paradox within the structure and formal function of the movement. The beklemmt section, although incongruously juxtaposed with the Cavatina is nevertheless understood as part of the same structure, joined by a circular harmonic process, and by thematic similarities. In effect, this movement comprises two elements that are simultaneously incongruous but related, juxtaposed but semantically connected, in a continuous paradox.

This paradoxical, circular process perhaps explains the formal oddity of the movement. In effect, the return of the opening music functions as an evocation or reminiscence, rather than as a full recapitulation. This accounts for both the truncated dimensions of this apparent da capo return, as well as the lack of a recapitulation of the “second” theme (from bars 23 onward). The point of the return is to effect the connection between the two incongruous sections – to suggest a continual ‘circular’ process – rather than simply to repeat the opening material for the sake of formal propriety. Indeed, the manner in which the movement ends could support such a viewpoint. Despite the overlapping cadential material in bars 63 to 66 there is no strong perfect cadence; rather, the movement simply stops on a repeated E flat chord. The effect of this is that ending is as syntactically “open” as the beginning, the lack of closure implying the possibility of continuation.

The juxtaposition of the Cavatina and beklemmt sections could be understood as an ironic contrast resulting in a destruction of the aesthetic illusion – the artifice – of the Cavatina by the unconventional beklemmt section. However, whereas, in Romantic irony (as seen in the Op. 132 quartet) there are incongruous elements *within* the structure of the elements, this movement comprises two completely internally congruent elements. As will be seen, in this case neither element is objectified: rather, the structure may be considered simply as a balanced juxtaposition of two incongruous elements.

As will be considered more fully below, if balanced juxtapositions of incongruous elements such as those of the Cavatina (and, as will be seen, the Grosse Fuge) may be considered to be paradoxical, then they may also be correlated with the paradoxes seen in the form of irony known variously as “general”, “Socratic” or “existential” irony. As will be demonstrated, the important relationship between the fundamental basis of this form of irony and paradox also produces a connection between this general, existential irony and Schlegel’s conception of Romantic irony. This connection is important for the reading of the movements of Op. 130 given here: the relationship between Beethoven and Schlegel’s philosophy seen above strengthens such an ironic interpretation of these works.

Therefore, in order to establish the basis for these readings I will first consider the relationship between paradox and general, existential irony. In addition, the manner in which musical structures such as those of the Cavatina and the Grosse Fuge may be considered paradoxical, and the manner in which the process of objectification functions in such structures will also be considered. Finally, analysis of the Grosse Fuge will attempt to demonstrate that, like the Cavatina it produces a fundamental ironic paradox.

## General Irony

The first difficulty in dealing with general, existential irony is to recognise that it originates primarily from a philosophical viewpoint regarding the fundamental nature of existence. That is, that whereas Romantic irony and satire are primarily discursive forms, inherently associated with artistic technique, general irony is first and foremost a perception of existence as ironic. Muecke outlines its fundamental basis:

General Irony lies in those contradictions, apparently fundamental and irresolvable, that confront men when they speculate upon such topics as the origin and purpose of the universe, the certainty of death, the eventual extinction of all life, the impenetrability of the future, the conflicts between reason, emotion, and instinct, freewill and determinism, the objective and the subjective, society and the individual, the absolute and the relative, the humane and the scientific. Most of these, it may be said, are reducible to one great incongruity, the appearance of self-valued and subjectively free but temporally finite egos in a universe that seems to be utterly alien, utterly purposeless, completely deterministic, and incomprehensibly vast.<sup>14</sup>

Although understanding existence as paradoxical and ironic was a conception of profound importance in the Nineteenth, and especially the Twentieth centuries, its origins are far older. Muecke, for example, considers this type of irony in classical antiquity, particularly in Xenophon, but he also states that “it is probable that the perception of ‘General Irony’ situations is as old as philosophic thought, as old as the discovery that natural forces are not to be controlled by magic or propitiated by sacrifices”.<sup>15</sup>

As will be elaborated below, the baseline of general irony is a twofold paradox. Firstly, existence itself is perceived to be paradoxical, containing contradictory elements – the oppositions that Muecke highlights – that nevertheless co-exist in incongruous juxtaposition. Secondly, our relation to that universe is paradoxical: we, as finite beings seek to impose a finite order – meaning, value and purpose – on a universe that is infinite. In doing so we create the paradoxical structure of the perceived universe; existence, in other words, is paradoxical because of our attempts

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<sup>14</sup> Muecke (1970) p. 67/68

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 69

to find meaning. It is therefore the human condition that the more we seek such “meaning”, the greater the paradox and irony.

According to Sheinberg, such general irony (which she refers to as “existential irony”) may be understood in terms of two types – “negative” and “positive”. As will be seen, these ‘types’ are essentially opposing viewpoints concerning the ironic paradoxes of existence, describing the same phenomena in opposing terms. In the case of “negative” existential irony these paradoxes are viewed as a negation of all knowledge, all “positivity”. The essence of this type lies in the ironic consciousness that Kierkegaard attributes to Socrates. In *The Concept of Irony* he argues that the perception of existence as ironic, indeed the phenomenon of irony itself began with Socrates:

If irony is a qualification of subjectivity, then it must manifest itself the first time subjectivity makes its appearance in world history . . . This points to the historical turning point where subjectivity made its appearance for the first time, and with this we have come to Socrates.<sup>16</sup>

Kierkegaard’s consideration of Socratic irony centres on Socrates’ *consciousness* of his own ironic, paradoxical position. In Plato’s *Apology*, for example, Socrates describes his understanding of the “human wisdom”<sup>17</sup> attributed to him by the Delphic oracle:

The truth of the matter, gentlemen, is pretty certainly this: that real wisdom is the property of God, and this oracle is his way of telling us that human wisdom has little or no value . . . he would say to us ‘The wisest of you is he who has realised, like Socrates, that in respect of wisdom he is really worthless’.<sup>18</sup>

Socrates ‘wisdom’ is his consciousness of his own condition of ignorance. According to Socrates, the highest achievement of human wisdom is made by he who realises that he can never truly know anything, except, perhaps, for the knowledge that he can know nothing. Thus from Socrates’ viewpoint all of humanity is the victim of a

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<sup>16</sup> Kierkegaard (1841) p. 264

<sup>17</sup> Plato *Apology*, trans. Tredennick (1954) p. 49

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 52



paradoxical irony: the knowledge that we think we have turns out to be nothingness. Crucially, although Socrates is himself in the same position his ignorance is vitally different: he is continually conscious of this ignorance, and, as Kierkegaard repeatedly stresses it is precisely this consciousness that produced Socrates' irony:

When Socrates declared that he was ignorant, he nevertheless did know something, for he knew about his ignorance; on the other hand, however, this knowledge was not a knowledge of something, that is, did not have any positive content, and to that extent his ignorance was ironic . . . If his knowledge had been a knowledge of something, his ignorance would merely have been a conversational technique. His irony, however, was complete in itself. Inasmuch, then, as his ignorance was simultaneously earnest and yet again not earnest, it is on this prong that Socrates must be held. To know that one is ignorant is the beginning of coming to know, but if one does not know more, it is merely a beginning. This knowledge was what kept Socrates ironically afloat.<sup>19</sup>

Socrates' ignorance in itself was not ironic, however; rather, his consciousness of his own ignorance produced objectification, leading him to view both the world (Kierkegaard uses the term "actuality") and his own position in a fundamentally ironic light. This process, as will be seen, is therefore effectively a self-objectification or self-satirising, which allows him to view his own position ironically. Though aware of his own ignorance, he can do nothing about it – it is part of his very humanity: no matter what knowledge he gained, he could never truly know anything. Thus, according to Kierkegaard, "the whole of existence has become alien to the ironic subject [Socrates] and the ironic subject in turn alien to existence, that as actuality has lost its validity for the ironic subject, he himself has to a certain degree become unactual".<sup>20</sup> Socrates' consciousness frees him, to a certain extent from the predicament by producing an ultimate, infinite irony.

Kierkegaard, following Hegel, defines the process of this Socratic irony as "infinite absolute negativity". The basis of this definition rests upon Hegelian dialectics, whereby every assertion contains within itself the seed of its own negation. This definition implies an infinite process of negation, a continual movement from

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<sup>19</sup> Kierkegaard (1841) p. 269

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 259

assertion to negation, and therefore an infinite chain of irony. As a result of this process everything is negated except irony itself – it alone remains absolute.

In contrast, in “positive” existential irony the fundamental paradoxes of existence are not considered in terms of infinite negation, but rather as a positive process: “the irony of reality is . . . wholly accepted as a phenomenon, as a fact, which does not need or seek a solution”.<sup>21</sup> The conception of existential paradoxes as “negation” thus arises solely from the imposition of finite human logic upon these fundamental contradictions: if actuality is inherently contradictory then the existence of this paradox does not necessarily imply human ignorance of some fundamental “truth”. From this viewpoint the infinite negation of Socratic irony is replaced with a positive perception of paradox.

Bakhtin’s theory of “carnival” (together with the related concepts of “unfinalizability” and the grotesque) might be given as an example of such “positive” existential irony. The juxtaposition of opposites and the overturning of social norms that is inherent in carnival and in the grotesque is a freeing process, infinitely creative and unfinalizable (i.e. open-ended, always potential, never conclusive). Carnival, and carnival laughter “challenge all social norms that have ever been or *ever will be*; they incorporate a spirit of joyful negation of everything completed or to be completed”.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Morson and Emerson’s comments reveal the “positive” existential basis of carnival: “In carnival, Bakhtin thought he had discovered a social ritual of pure antinomianism, and in carnival laughter he detected an eternally “unofficial,” “second truth about the world” – a truth that rejects the existence of all Truth. Laughter becomes a “universal philosophical form””.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Sheinberg (2000) p. 44

<sup>22</sup> Morson and Emerson (1990) p. 94

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p. 92/93. There is an important relationship between Bakhtin’s theory of carnival and the grotesque and Schlegel’s philosophy. Bakhtin considers that

Unlike the medieval and Renaissance grotesque, which was directly related to folk culture and thus belonged to all the people, the Romantic genre acquired a private “chamber” character. It became, as it were, an individual carnival, marked by a vivid sense of isolation. The carnival spirit was transposed into a subjective, idealistic

Sheinberg argues that the difference between negative and positive existential irony arises initially from issues of morality and ethics. She considers, for example, that for Kierkegaard irony was “morally negative and even socially dangerous”,<sup>24</sup> and that the description of it as “negativity” therefore results from the imposition of this belief upon the phenomenon.<sup>25</sup> However, although the moralistic aspect of Hegel’s understanding of irony (from which Kierkegaard derived his definition) lingers, to an extent in Kierkegaard’s discussion,<sup>26</sup> the negativity that he continually ascribes to irony is the infinite, absolute process of negation of every positive assertion rather than a morally negative process.<sup>27</sup> The difference is significant: existential irony does not possess an inherent morality or ethic by which it can be differentiated into “negative” and “positive” types. Rather, the distinction occurs simply as two

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philosophy. It ceased to be the concrete (one might say bodily) experience of the one, inexhaustible being, as it was in the Middle ages and the Renaissance (Bakhtin, Mikhail (1941) *Rabelais and his World* p. 37)

He refers specifically to Schlegel as a “theorist” (ibid.) of this new genre, relating explicitly to his concept of irony. It may therefore be seen that there is a strong element of the “positive”, generative force of carnival and existential irony at the core of Schlegel’s thought (ibid. p. 41).

<sup>24</sup> Sheinberg (2000) p. 42

<sup>25</sup> The situation is, however, more complex than Sheinberg allows. Kierkegaard actually considered Socrates’ irony a necessary stage in world-historical development, functioning as a beginning point – the infinite possibility of positivity. Thus Socratic irony was not for him simply morally negative, but rather both negative and positive simultaneously:

Socrates has no positive system; but it must be added that by its pressure the infinite negativity has made all positivity possible, has been an infinite incitement and stimulation for positivity. Just as in daily life Socrates could begin anywhere, so his significance in the world-historical development is to be the infinite beginning that contains within itself a multiplicity of beginnings. Thus as a beginning he was positive, but as mere beginning he is negative . . . the unity thereof is precisely irony. (Kierkegaard (1841) p. 216/217)

<sup>26</sup> This moralistic element may be seen throughout Hegel’s discussions of irony: “The proximate form of this negativity which has been called irony is, then, on the one hand, the illusory nature of all that is matter of fact, or moral, or of substantive content, the nothingness of all that is objective and of essential and independent worth. So long as the Ego adheres to such a standpoint as this, everything appears to be null and void, the personal subjectivity alone excepted, which thereby becomes hollow and empty, and nothing but conceit itself.” Hegel, G.W.F. *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, trans F.P.B Osmaston (1920) p. 90/91

<sup>27</sup> “Irony is the infinitely light playing with nothing that is not terrified by it but even rises to the surface on occasion . . . it is earnestness about nothing – insofar as it is not earnestness about something. It continually conceives of nothing in contrast to something, and in order to free itself of earnestness about anything, it grasps the nothing. But it does not become earnestness about nothing, either, except insofar as it is not earnestness about anything.” Kierkegaard (1841) p. 270

different views regarding essentially the same perception of paradox: one regards it as infinite negation, the other as infinite assertion.

Crucially, Schlegel's conception of Romantic irony is related to both "types" of existential irony. Although "positive" existential irony is often considered as a primarily twentieth-century concern, it actually forms an integral element of Schlegel's irony. Romantic irony, as Hatten states, possesses "a critical perspective, from a higher plane on the workings of life or art";<sup>28</sup> it is, as considered in the second chapter, an aesthetic response to the fundamental paradoxes of both existence and of art. This fundamental existential basis is reflected in the crucial relationship between paradox and irony, in which, as seen, paradox is treated as a positive, generative element.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the background of post-Kantian philosophy seen throughout Schlegel's fragments relates to paradox in this manner: there is a continual balance of assertion and negation derived from the Fichtean model.

However, the emphasis on consciousness within Schlegel's writing on irony also creates a strong correlation with the type of ironic consciousness identified in Socrates.<sup>30</sup> In Socratic irony the consciousness of the existential paradox leads to the viewpoint that life itself is ironic, and that mankind is the victim of this irony. Schlegel's Critical (Lyceum) fragment number 42 (quoted in chapter 2 above) demonstrates that this Socratic ironic consciousness lies at the centre of his philosophy of irony, as embodied in Romantic poetry. Schlegel clearly relates the

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<sup>28</sup> Hatten (1994) p. 174. In addition, Hatten considers that Schlegel's irony "moves beyond the figurative trope, or even sustained dramatic irony, to the level of the author's (composer's) detachment and self-critical consciousness, not only from writing (composing) but from life as well. Thus, irony is inflated to a kind of cultural trope at the level of philosophical contemplation." (ibid.) This designation is reminiscent of Quintilian's consideration of Socrates, quoted above.

<sup>29</sup> Consider again Schlegel's description of irony the consciousness of as an "infinitely teeming [vollen] chaos" (Ideas no. 69, quoted in chapter 2 above): the use of "vollen" is fundamentally positive and generative.

<sup>30</sup> The influence of Socrates' irony upon Schlegel's philosophy of irony may be traced to Schlegel's renowned background in Classical scholarship. Plato's Socratic Dialogues are the most obvious source; however, Aristotle also refers to Socrates' irony within the *Nichomachean Ethics* (2.7.1108a 19-23, 4.7.1127a 20-26 and 4.7.7.1127b 22-26). In addition, Quintilian's comments in his *Oratorical Education* are of particular interest (*Institutiones oratoriae* 9.2.46). Within his discussion of irony as both trope and figure, he treats Socrates' entire life effectively as a third type of irony, neither trope nor figure. It is this third form of irony – Socratic irony – that forms an essential element of Romantic irony.



irony of "Romantic poetry" to Socratic irony: it is a reflection of life, a continual ironic consciousness like that of Socrates' irony, with the poetic creation resulting from the artist's consciousness of the paradox of existence. Moreover, Schlegel's description of irony in this fragment as "the mood that surveys everything and rises above all limitations, even its own art, virtue or genius"<sup>31</sup> finds echoes throughout Kierkegaard's later discussion of Socrates. Indeed, Kierkegaard highlights the relationship between Socratic and Schlegelian irony:

If irony is a qualification of subjectivity, we shall promptly see the necessity of two manifestations of this concept, and actuality has indeed attached names to them. The first one, of course, is the one in which subjectivity asserts its rights in world history for the first time. Here we have Socrates . . . For a new mode of irony to be able to appear now, it must result from the assertion of subjectivity in a still higher form. It must be subjectivity raised to the second power, a subjectivity's subjectivity, which corresponds to reflection's reflection . . . here again we meet irony. But since this position is an intensified subjective consciousness, it quite naturally is clearly and definitely conscious of irony and declares irony as its position. This was indeed the case with Friedrich Schlegel, who sought to bring it to bear in relation to actuality.<sup>32</sup>

Kierkegaard clearly considers that Schlegel's irony is based in the same fundamental consciousness of the irony of existence as Socratic irony.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, his comments highlight several important points concerning the relationship between Romantic and Socratic irony. The first of these is the clear development that he traces from Socratic irony to Schlegel's conception: both arise as a response to the same fundamental perception of existence as paradoxical. This is related to the second important point: the "general" or "existential" basis of both Romantic and Socratic irony requires a process of self-objectification.

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<sup>31</sup> Schlegel *Lyceum* fragment 42, p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Kierkegaard (1841) p. 242. Note that Kierkegaard's comments also highlight the post-Kantian subtext within the basis of Schlegel's irony. Indeed in defining irony as "the first and most abstract qualification of subjectivity" (ibid. p. 264) Kierkegaard reveals an inherently transcendental philosophical basis.

<sup>33</sup> See also the quotation from Wellek in the second chapter of this work: Schlegel's irony is the "recognition of the fact that the world in its essence is paradoxical". Wellek (1955) p. 14. Behler, moreover, clearly indicates the Socratic basis not only of Schlegel's irony, but also of his concept of literature:

"In varying formulations, Schlegel attempted to rescue the Socratic-Platonic irony of a configurative, indeterminate, self-transcending process of thinking and writing and to integrate it with the modern style of self-reflection and self-consciousness as the decisive mark of literary modernity". (Behler (1990) p. 82)



This common process may actually be seen in two unpublished fragments from Schlegel's *Literary Notebooks*. Fragment 778 begins "Irony = Self-parody?",<sup>34</sup> whilst in the next fragment, number 779, he states that "Socrates had transcendental satire".<sup>35</sup> These fragments are closely related to *Critical Fragment* 108, in which Schlegel describes Socratic irony as "continuous self-parody", in addition considering that:

Socratic irony is the only involuntary and yet completely deliberate dissimulation . . . It is the freest of all licenses, for by its means one transcends oneself; and yet it is also the most lawful, for it is absolutely necessary.<sup>36</sup>

In all three of these fragments the element of self-objectification is implied – indeed in the first it is actually stated: self-parody requires self-objectification. Similarly Schlegel's designation of Socrates' irony as satire also implies an objectifying process. This establishes a relationship between Romantic irony and "general", Socratic irony: both types involve a process of self-objectification (a function that will be considered more fully below).

Nevertheless, although there is a clear relationship between Romantic irony and these forms of "existential" irony, the difference between them is also important. As Kierkegaard's comments indicate, in Romantic irony there is an additional level of irony – the Romantic artist is conscious, not only of his position as the victim of ironic existence, but also conscious of his consciousness. In other words, the Romantic artist is the victim of a double irony, a double objectification of his position. Romantic irony is the self-objectification of an already ironic consciousness, an irony on irony – an artistic response through which the Romantic artist seeks to transcend the fundamental irony of existence.

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<sup>34</sup> Schlegel (1957) p. 91

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Schlegel (1991) *Critical (Lyceum)* fragment 108, p. 13

This difference is particularly important in relation to the quartet movements analysed here. The relationship between the types of irony is reflected in the manner in which paradox features so prominently in Schlegel's writing. Beethoven's proximity to Schlegel and the Romantics, and the connections between them, means that his work may be considered in terms of both of these related types of irony. Indeed, both types may be seen in these late works: whilst the Op. 132 quartet produces Romantic irony proper, the fundamental structures of the Cavatina and the Grosse Fuge from Op. 130 are simply paradoxical. These later movements lack the extra level of objectification – the continual parabasis – that occurs in Romantic irony. Rather, their structures simply present incongruous juxtapositions of individual elements, each of which is internally congruent. These movements will be considered in terms of paradox: the paradoxical structures of these movements will be correlated to the philosophical viewpoint of general, existential irony seen above. In other words, they will be considered as an expression of the fundamental, ironic paradox of existence.

In order to develop this viewpoint, however, two important areas need to be examined, before the final analysis of the Grosse Fuge. The first of these is the manner in which paradox may be seen to occur in musical discourse; the second is the manner in which the process of objectification can be seen to function in both philosophical and discursive forms of general, existential irony.

### **Incongruity, Contrariety and Paradox**

Considering ironic, existential paradox as a subject of musical discourse appears problematic. Whereas verbal discourses may express general irony in non-ironic forms, such as the simple statement of the philosophical viewpoint that "life is paradoxical" (which produces only a single semantic level), musical discourse cannot make such statements. Rather, it must actually present a paradox, which can then be correlated with the paradox of existence; music, in other words, must employ an ironic technique – must actually be ironic – to express the viewpoint of general irony.

Prerequisite to such correlations, however, is the understanding that the fundamental ironic paradox of existence may be conceived of as a *structure* of manifest oppositions or contrarities. This idea has important consequences: understanding general irony as a structure allows a correlation to discursive structures that produce paradox. In particular, as Sheinberg demonstrates, examples of irony in musical discourse arise because of such structural correlations – where musical structures incorporate incongruous elements this paradoxical structure may be directly correlated to the structure of irony.<sup>37</sup> It is therefore important to consider the manner in which such a paradoxical structure might arise.

As briefly suggested above, the balanced juxtaposition of incongruous elements within Beethoven's Cavatina (and, as will be seen, the Grosse Fuge) may be considered in terms of paradox. The basis of this viewpoint may be seen within Kerman's analysis of the first movement of Op. 130, which relates the extreme juxtapositions within this movement to paradox:

The piece celebrates dissociation, forced by the play – or rather the war – of contrast . . . Beethoven's central concern for contrast . . . here thrusts toward the breaking point; once the fragmented imagination had assumed control in the opening movement, paradox and indirection were destined to stay with the piece to the end.<sup>38</sup>

Kinderman is more assertive, arguing that the first movement of this quartet carries binary oppositions “into the realm of paradox . . . in Op. 130 they seem to be pursued for their own sake to create a condition of paradox”.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the composite theme in the coda, constructed from the two opposing themes is Beethoven's “supreme exercise in paradox”.<sup>40</sup> Hatten considers, on a more general level, that such juxtapositions of contradictory or previously unrelated types signal shifts in discursive level, and that this shifting of level creates Romantic irony.<sup>41</sup> Finally,

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<sup>37</sup> Sheinberg (2000) p. 16/17

<sup>38</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 320

<sup>39</sup> Kinderman (1995) *Beethoven* p. 299

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* p. 300

<sup>41</sup> Hatten (1994) p. 170, 174. Note, however, as considered above this process is more accurately

Sheinberg also highlights the correlation between such juxtapositions and paradox. In particular, she considers that “musical juxtapositions of apparently irreconcilable incongruities would convey [existential] irony. More often than not they would appear simultaneously or with very short-span alternations between two or more musical topics”.<sup>42</sup> She adds that such instances of existential irony require “an almost perfect balance”<sup>43</sup> between the incongruous elements in order to succeed.

The implication that may be drawn from all of these writers is that the balanced juxtaposition of incongruous elements may be considered to produce a musical correlative of paradox. Crucially, such cases would also form correlatives or analogues of existential irony. This form of irony is itself defined, particularly within Schlegel’s writing, in terms of paradox – existence is considered essentially as an infinite paradox of contradictory “actualities”. Thus paradoxical structures may therefore be considered as expressing the same fundamental irony, as correlatives expressions of an existential paradox.

This definition of paradox, however, is problematic: the combination of contrasting, even contradictory semantic elements occurs prominently within innumerable musical discourses, particularly sonata forms. This poses the question of whether simply presenting a structure which comprises contradictory elements within a larger meta-structure is enough to produce a paradox. If so then, as a result, such structures may be considered correlatives of existential irony; sonata form, indeed virtually all music could therefore, from a certain point of view, be considered ironic. Consequently, paradox, and, by extension, cases of existential irony would become virtually meaningless as a subject of musical discourse.

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understood as the Muecke’s “proto” Romantic irony; it is not fully-developed Romantic irony in Schlegel’s sense of the term (see Muecke (1969) p. 164/5).

<sup>42</sup> Sheinberg (2000) p. 62 She adds, moreover, that music that displays “juxtapositions of more than one stylistic or topical context, none of which may be regarded as ‘governing’” may be regarded as conveying irony (ibid. p. 64).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

This interpretation, though, arises because of an emphasis on the relationship of contrariety between the elements of an ironic structure. In other words, sonata form is a correlative of paradox only if one considers that in both the elements are contrasting or even contradictory, and yet co-exist within a greater meta-structure. Irony, however, arises from incongruity, rather than simply from contrast; this difference between incongruity and contrast allows the separation of music's normal contrasts from cases of musical paradox.

Hatten's analysis of musical metaphor and irony through musical troping is significant in this regard. He argues that troping – the bringing together of different correlations to produce, by synthesis, a third meaning – requires the contradiction of “stylistic expectation”, which must occur within the same “functional location”.<sup>44</sup> For example, the use of a closural articulation as an opening produces a contradiction within the functional location of the beginning, which must be accounted for on a higher level of the discourse. Crucially, “without a functional location or process to enclose the two terms or to set up a certain stylistic expectation, one could not claim the existence of contradiction. Instead the “difference” would simply register as contrast”.<sup>45</sup>

Although Hatten's definition of irony is, as indicated above, somewhat problematic,<sup>46</sup> his comments on contradiction indicate that incongruity involves more than simple contrast. If Hatten's criteria of functional location and stylistic

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<sup>44</sup> Hatten (1994) p. 169

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> For example, Hatten's insistence upon contradiction within one “functional location” means that his definition cannot account for instances of irony such as the juxtapositions of tragic and comic scenes that A.W. Schlegel identified in Shakespeare. Such juxtapositions do not occur within the same functional location, and therefore would not, according to Hatten's definition be considered ironic. Moreover, the fact that Hatten deals with both irony and metaphor in essentially the same way – as tropes arising from juxtapositions of contradictory elements – means that, in practice, the distinction between them is not always clear. He considers that this difference resides in that, whilst in metaphor the elements of the trope do not negate, irony always involves negation and reversal (This clearly mirrors Booth's discussion of the same problem: Booth considers that states that the process of metaphor, in contrast to irony is “not usually one of repudiation or reversal but of exploration or extension . . . The essential process . . . is addition or multiplication, not subtraction” (Booth (1974) p. 23).) He does not, however, demonstrate how negation is to be differentiated from contradiction, and this weakens his consideration of irony.



expectation may be subsumed under the term context, then incongruity, in comparison to contrast and contrariety, may be seen to be based not solely in logic (or even perceptual logic), but rather in context. Although all incongruity involves contrast, incongruity is not defined by the *content* of an opposition, but by the *context* in which this opposition occurs. Incongruity is not simply contrast – it is contrast which violates or contradicts contextual or stylistic norms. For example, within sonata form one *expects* that contrast, and even, in some cases, the most extreme of contradictions will occur, and on some level be reconciled into a greater whole. Therefore, such contrasts are not considered incongruous: they are stylistically and contextually expected. As such, there is no paradox, and consequently a correlation to irony is untenable.

Paradox can only occur in structures that present incongruous elements. However, it is vital to recognise that these incongruous elements must be completely internally congruent, in order that they constitute discrete contexts. If any of the elements were to contain incongruities, then these incongruities would tend to produce, within the individual elements, the effect of parody or satire, and would introduce a parabasis effect. In this case the resulting structure – internally *incongruent* elements in juxtaposition – would correlate to the multi-levelled structure of Romantic irony, rather than to the simple paradox of general existential irony.

The Cavatina presents a balanced juxtaposition of incongruous elements, each of which is internally congruent i.e. incongruously juxtaposed contexts. The interruption of one stylistic context and sudden juxtaposition with another contravenes the stylistic norms – the context – of the elements. This violation of the stylistic context, according to the definition given, produces incongruity, rather than simple contrast. This results in co-existent incongruous elements; in other words, this incongruity produces the type of paradox defined above. Crucially, the correlation between such paradoxical structures and existential irony means that, in this movement this type of irony is treated not simply as a subject of the discourse, but rather as the *substance* of the discourse, the message of its meta-structure.

Indeed Beethoven uses the incongruous structure of this movement to force the perception of paradox upon the listener. This occurs largely through the use of extremes: the Cavatina is the most lyrical movement of the entire quartet; indeed within the context of the earlier movements it sounds strikingly emotive. The beklemmt section which opposes it is, however, even more intense. Indeed, with this contrasting section Beethoven takes the process of juxtaposition one step further – the beklemmt section is not only juxtaposed with the preceding Cavatina material, rather, it *interrupts* it. The incongruity of this juxtaposition – the violation of the Cavatina – foregrounds the contrast between the sections: the interruption forces the contradictory elements into confrontation, and forces the perception of this conflict upon the listener. The ‘solution’ of this confrontation, however, is paradoxical. The circular process of the movement creates a relationship between the elements, producing an impossible relationship of both contrariety and complementation. Beethoven’s Cavatina thus, in A.W. Schlegel’s terms “shows both sides of the medal”<sup>47</sup> – it expresses an ironic existential paradox of incongruous, antithetical viewpoints.

As will be seen, the Grosse Fuge goes still further. In this movement Beethoven accumulates the type of extreme juxtapositions seen in the Cavatina, amplifying the foregrounding of incongruity and paradox to breaking point. The very nature of the music in this movement, and the force of the juxtapositions between elements are so extreme that they cannot be reconciled. This overwhelming presentation of paradox may be taken as an expression of general existential irony – this movement forcefully objectifies *all* of the incongruous, juxtaposed elements within its paradoxical structure.

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<sup>47</sup> Schlegel, A. W. (1808) p. 369

## Paradox, Satire and Objectification

Before analysing the paradoxical structure of the *Grosse Fuge*, however, it is important to briefly consider the manner in which the process of objectification functions in cases of existential irony. Muecke, Booth<sup>48</sup> and Sheinberg all differentiate general irony from satire; Sheinberg, for example considers that

There are two kinds of irony: satirical and non-satirical. Satirical irony is attached to a given set of norms and values, and its final aim is to prefer only one of the incongruous elements of the message, i.e. to become a non-ironical message. Non-satirical irony, on the other hand, is more complicated. Often called 'romantic irony' it actually encompasses three different types of irony.<sup>49</sup>

Although the philosophical emphases of these three "non-satirical" types – Romantic irony and both "positive" and "negative" existential irony – are contradictory, nevertheless, all three originate from the same fundamental perception of existence as paradoxical. Crucially, Sheinberg considers existential irony does not produce the "preferencing" that occurs in "satirical" irony; rather, this type of non-satirical irony is a constant "balanced" state of paradox.<sup>50</sup>

However, throughout previous chapters the process of objectification was considered the basic criterion for irony. Such objectification will, by definition, produce "preferencing": the "objectifying" viewpoint will always be preferred over the

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<sup>48</sup> Booth uses the terms "stable" vs. "unstable" to differentiate forms such as satire and parody from existential or general types of irony. Nevertheless, the differentiation clearly reflects the same underlying thought.

<sup>49</sup> Sheinberg (2000) p. 61

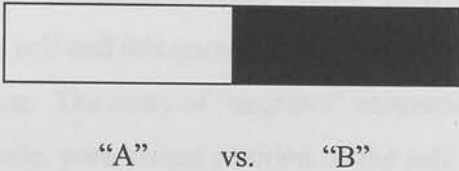
<sup>50</sup> This may be seen in her assertion that whilst "negative" irony requires an objectifying, ironising viewpoint, "positive" existential irony does not:

"[Negative irony] assumes the existence of an ironist (i.e. of an 'intention') who alienates himself from his surrounding reality, assuming a superior position from which he contemplates the absurdities of life . . . [Positive] Existential irony, on the other hand, does not necessarily demand the alienation of the contemplating subject from reality, but accepts his own consciousness as being an integral part of this reality and accepts the fact that reality does not necessarily play by the rules of logic". Ibid. p. 44/45

The lack of an alienated, ironising viewpoint in existential irony thus appears to preclude either preferencing or objectification.

“objectified” viewpoint. Therefore, if cases of existential irony (whether as discursive structure or philosophical world-view) are to be understood in terms of objectification, they must also be considered to produce preferencing.

This may be approached through considering the relationship between the different types of irony, which may be seen in the following diagrams. If all forms of irony may be understood in terms of objectification it becomes possible to relate them all to one single structure of opposed incongruous elements:



The simplest case is found in satire where, in relation to the above diagram, the process of objectification occurs at the level of the actual opposition between the incongruous elements. In such cases one element of the incongruous structure – one “viewpoint” – is preferred over the other element. This preferencing confirms one of the “meanings” of the discourse, whilst negating the other: the preferred meaning becomes the “non-ironical message”<sup>51</sup> of the discourse, whilst the rejected meaning is objectified, becoming the victim of the satire.

The process of objectification in existential irony is less obvious. In the case of the philosophical aspect of this irony it arises primarily as an objectification of all “non-ironic” viewpoints or realities by the viewpoint that “existence is infinitely contradictory and ironic”. This process is fundamentally the same in all ‘types’ of existential irony – “positive”, “negative” or “Romantic”: although there are differences in the philosophical basis of “positive” and “negative” existential irony this difference relates only to the manner in which existential paradoxes are perceived. “Negative” existential irony (the type attributed to Socrates) assumes a

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

“truth” of which humanity is irrevocably ignorant. In contrast, in “positive” existential irony ‘reality’ is considered to be inherently contradictory and paradoxical, rather than logical and systematic – there is no “truth”. Both types, however, share the fundamental perception of existence as paradoxical: from the “negative” viewpoint this paradox is understood as infinite negation, reducing everything to nothing, from the “positive” viewpoint it represents infinite assertion.

In both cases, however, it is not simply the perception of existential paradoxes that entails objectification and irony: rather, objectification arises from the perception of this perception *as irony*. It arises, in other words, from a consciousness of the relationship between the self and this paradoxical existence – a consciousness of the irony of my own situation. The irony of “negative” existential irony arises from the consciousness of the ironic, paradoxical position of the self – the consciousness of one’s own “ignorance”; in “positive” existential irony it arises not simply from the perception and acceptance of existential paradoxes, but rather from the consciousness of the ironic position of the self within this paradox. In both cases this process is effectively one of self-objectification: the fact that I am aware of the irony in my situation, indeed that I allow myself to accept it, to participate in it, and even to be, as Muecke writes, the victim of an impossible situation,<sup>52</sup> places me in exactly the same position as Socrates: my consciousness self-objectifies. Despite differences in philosophical viewpoint the perception of oneself as the victim of irony is the same – the process of self-objectification forms the essential basis of the irony. From this very specific viewpoint then everything, including the self, is the victim of an existential irony: “general” irony encompasses both positive and negative existential irony, as the self-objectification of a finite viewpoint within a paradoxical ‘reality’.

In cases of existential irony in discourse this objectification process manifests itself somewhat differently. Where there is a simple presentation of paradox – a balanced juxtaposition of incongruous contexts – objectification does not occur between the elements of the structure, as in the case of satire. Rather, there are actually two

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<sup>52</sup> Muecke (1969) p. 120



levels of incongruity operative, the objectification process occurring on the second level of the discourse. The function of this second, objectifying level may be seen in the following exquisite example – the first two lines of *New Corn*, by the Chinese poet T'ao Ch'ien:

Swiftly the years, beyond recall.  
Solemn the stillness of this spring morning.<sup>53</sup>

This is an extreme example of a discourse constructed from two complete but opposed semantic structures. As Empson observes, it comprises two opposed “time-scales”,<sup>54</sup> which are essentially contrasting semantic levels, neither of which is preferred; both are equally valid, their simultaneous existence producing a paradoxical structure of opposition.

The opposition between the two contradictory elements of this example – the “movement” of time in the first sentence versus its “stasis” in the second – form a first level of incongruity. However, the perfect balance between these elements precludes either objectification or preferencing in this discursive level. These occur, rather, within a second level of incongruity, which arises between *both* of the individual elements and the greater meta-structure of which they are part. Each element of the structure individually implies a state of “non-paradox” – each represents a single viewpoint from “within” which time is either moving or static. However, the incongruous juxtaposition of these discrete, opposing elements produces a meta-structure that is paradoxical. This generates an opposition between the respective “non-paradoxical” viewpoints of the individual elements and the paradox produced by their simultaneous co-existence. Thus although there is no objectification *between* the elements, the incongruity of their juxtaposition results in the objectification of the “non-paradoxical” actuality of *both* of the individual

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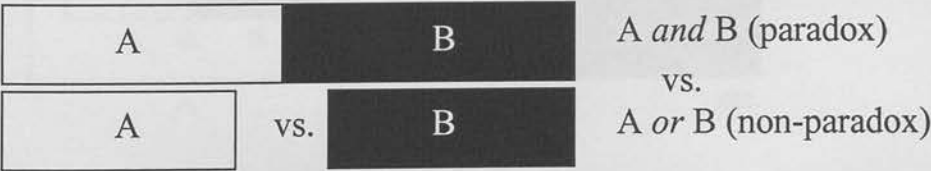
<sup>53</sup> Waley, Arthur (1962) *170 Chinese Poems* p. 60

<sup>54</sup> In his analysis Empson considers the words ‘swift’ and ‘still’ to be ambiguous because “though each is meant to be referred to one particular time-scale...between them they put two time-scales into the reader’s mind in a single act of apprehension” (Empson, William (1956) *Seven Types of Ambiguity* p. 24). As will be considered in the final chapter of this thesis, however, this poem is actually an example of a paradoxical structure, rather than ambiguity.

elements by the paradoxical meta-structure: in other words, the apparent “realities” of both of the individual elements are actually seen to be “artificial”.

Crucially, this objectification of both elements of the paradoxical structure may be understood as a preferencing of paradox over non-paradox. The paradoxical structure of the poem correlates to the “superior” viewpoint that “life is paradoxical”. This viewpoint objectifies the individual elements of the paradoxical structure, which represent the view that “life is not paradoxical”, by opposing them within a greater paradoxical structure. This paradoxical presentation, in other words, suggests the viewpoint of an ironic consciousness that created the juxtaposition; in effect it implies the presence of an ironic author. Such cases thus do not simply present a paradox, rather their very existence posits an objectifying, ironic viewpoint. Discursive paradoxes such as these may therefore be understood as representing the viewpoint of existential irony. The simple presentation of a paradoxical structure produces the preferencing of one ironic message over other non-ironic messages: the “meta-message” of these structures is paradoxical – such structures ‘mean’ “Paradox”.

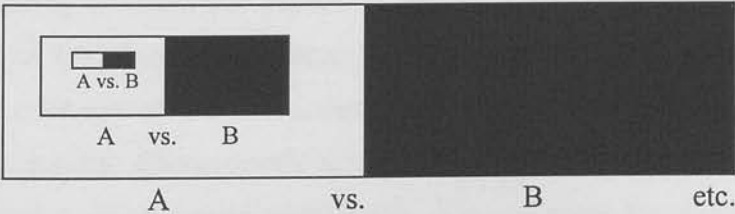
This process is represented in the following diagram. The two levels of incongruity occur between the elements of the structure (A vs. B), and between the meta-structure and these individual elements (i.e. A *and* B (paradox) vs. A *or* B (non-paradox)). Objectification occurs, as it were, in a “downwards” direction between the upper and lower levels, rather than between the opposed elements of the lower level. The “actuality” represented by the equally-balanced elements of the opposition is objectified by the paradox of their simultaneous co-existence within the meta structure.



All cases of general, existential irony will engender the preferencing seen in this process: each forces exactly the same confrontation of paradox and non-paradox as that seen in the poem. Regardless of whether existential paradoxes are considered as negation or assertion, existential irony is fundamentally a preferencing of the viewpoint of existence as paradox over the individual, “non-paradoxical” elements of which it is comprised. This understanding may be seen within Muecke’s comments on general irony. He states that this ironic viewpoint

may be quite wrong. It is, however, accepted as reality by a great many modern writers, and that is a sufficient basis for irony: the ironist needs only to be convinced that his view of reality is valid and another contradictory view is not. In this case the contrary view is the conviction that ‘God’s in his heaven – All’s right with the world!’ or at least an ineradicable feeling that the world really ought to make sense, that it ought to be organised according to the principles of reason and justice, that death is not really the end, that we do have freewill, that the rights of society and the individual are reconcilable, that man is not a biological dead-end, that life is not a chemical accident. One has also to add that General Irony is an irony of a rather special kind, in that the ironic observer is also among the victims of irony along with the rest of mankind.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, it is important to note that Romantic irony shares the same basic objectifying structure as that seen in satire. As with existential irony, however, there is an additional level of incongruity: here, the objectification of viewpoints is “upwards” between the individual elements and the meta-structure; it is an objectification of the external, god-like viewpoint by our own, limited viewpoint. Through the first level of irony – the use of techniques of parabasis – the ironist momentarily sets himself, his system, above this external, infinite viewpoint. This creates a second level of irony, which produces a third and then a fourth: there is, in other words, an infinite chain from the position of the object of irony – the objectified – to that of the perpetrator of it – the objectifier:



<sup>55</sup> Muecke (1970) p. 68/69

Therefore, although the process of objectification occurs on different levels in each of the various “strains” of irony, nevertheless, each may be derived from the same structure. Every irony involves an opposition of co-existent incongruous elements, which produces objectification and preferencing – the different ‘species’ of irony are generated simply according to the level upon which this fundamental objectification occurs. Every irony, in other words, has a “victim”, even if, as in Romantic irony or general “existential” irony, the victim is also the ironist.

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### **The Grosse Fuge, Op. 133**

Whilst the Cavatina of Op. 130 may be considered to be an exquisite example of general existential irony, it is far outweighed by the movement that originally followed it – the Grosse Fuge, one of the pinnacles of Beethoven’s output. Significantly, the structure of this work correlates with general irony in the same manner as the Cavatina: it presents a paradox of juxtaposed, incongruous elements, large “fragments” that are simply hammered together in incongruous juxtaposition. Crucially, each of these elements is thematically related: this simultaneous opposition and relationship results in paradox. In contrast to the quartet Op. 132 however, each of the subsections of this movement is internally congruent, possessing no incongruous elements. Rather, the juxtaposition of sections produces a structural incongruity that correlates with existential irony. Indeed, this work will be seen to possess several levels, not only of irony, but also of ambiguity.

The incongruous structure that extends across the entire movement may be seen in microcosm in the opening Overtura. Here almost all the incongruities that will inform the structure of the movement occur in more extreme juxtaposition than occurs subsequently. Consequently, it is here that the paradox of the movement – the existential irony – is expressed most clearly. Kerman states the case for considering the Overtura as incongruent most succinctly: “One primary fact is being set forth here: the paradox that four themes, utterly incongruous in feeling, can be made of the

same note set”.<sup>56</sup> The fundamental paradox of the movement is that although the subsections of the Overtura are incongruous, nevertheless they function as versions of the same “main” theme. The Overtura thus contains, in embryo, the irony of the Grosse Fuge: many incongruous, opposed elements are paradoxically shown to be part of the same structure.

It is important to consider that the incongruity of the Overtura does not occur simply as a result of the contrast between the sections, but rather from the manner in which they are juxtaposed. The rhythmic diminution of the opening gesture that occurs in bars 11 - 16, for example, sounds like a development of those bars. Similarly, the Meno Mosso (bar 17) occurs as a simple contrast: a process that is stylistically expected, particularly in slow introductions. However, by the time that the dual themes of the first fugue are reached (bar 31) they occur as the fifth contrasting section and thematic transformation in only 30 bars.

Thus whilst contrast is a stylistic element of many introductions, the extent of the sudden juxtapositions in these bars is stylistically incongruous. The sections of the Overtura do not occur as transformations of the theme – the transformation of themes is usually a matter of process – but rather as contrasting, incongruous versions of it. The sudden juxtapositions of different versions of the same theme produce the paradox that Kerman identifies.

Ex. 5.4 Op. 133  
Overtura.  
Allegro

<sup>56</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 278



11

*f*

17 **Meno mosso e moderato** **Allegro**

*p* *pp*

27 **Fuga**

*sempre pp* *ff* *sf* *f* *f*

33

*sf* *f* *f* *ff* *sf* *sf* *sf* *sf*



However, I would suggest that the paradox of the Overtura, and the correlation with irony that results, are evaluated as such only retrospectively, with the context of the whole movement behind them. As will be seen, the juxtapositions of bars 650 to 670 recall the process of the Overtura, and it is only with this recapitulation that the full extent of the paradox of the opening bars is revealed. Although the elements of the Overtura present contrasting versions of the same theme, and although this does create incongruity, the process of the Overtura must be evaluated, not singularly, but rather as part of the larger structure of the movement.

Indeed, on first hearing the Overtura is more likely to produce ambiguity than paradox. As will be seen in the final chapter of this work, ambiguity is, to a greater or lesser extent, involved in the opening of every work as part of the normal unfolding of discourse. Such ambiguity occurs largely because of the expectation of continuation that occurs at the beginning of every movement; simply put, there are always multiple possibilities for how the work will proceed. Since it occurs at the beginning of the movement the Overtura produces ambiguity as to the manner in which the work is to continue.

This ambiguity is seen clearest at the fermata in bar 30. By this point in the structure several subsections have been presented, each of which can be heard as a separate theme, capable of sustaining development. Significantly, all of the themes are clearly related to a single thematic nucleus; each occurs as a version of a "fundamental theme". In addition, these bars follow a circle of fifths from G to B flat; occurring at the opening of a movement this process means that there is no

stable tonal centre, but rather several potential tonalities. Similarly, the different metres of the fragments within the Overtura mean that there are several possible alternative metres presented.

Thus at the fermata in bar 30 there are several potential courses that the work could take, several different thematic, harmonic and metrical options. Each of these forms a potential “outcome” of the introduction – the work could proceed by developing one of the previous themes, or indeed by introducing a new theme. Moreover, since each of the thematic fragments is presented more-or-less equally, at this stage none of them is a “preferred” option. This creates a structure of alternative potential outcomes similar to those identified as ambiguities in the final chapter of this work.

Although the Overtura does produce a paradoxical structure, its ambiguity is equally important to the unfolding of the work. This opening section represents an embryonic form of the ironic structure of the whole movement, but its positioning at the beginning of the work produces a powerful ambiguity. To ignore this ambiguous function is to ignore an important function of the Overtura in relation to the movement: the subsequent structure of the whole movement is an unfolding of that of the opening. As Richard Kramer observes, “this opening music, menu-like, advertises the four main “subjects” of the music to follow . . . these four premonitions are . . . hints at the music to follow”.<sup>57</sup>

The manner in which this “unfolding” occurs, however, is crucial. Like the preceding Cavatina movement, the various sections of the Grosse Fuge (each of which develops from the Overtura) are incongruously juxtaposed. This results in a paradoxical structure of incongruously juxtaposed sections, each of which is derived from the same thematic nucleus – a structure that correlates with existential irony.

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<sup>57</sup> Kramer, Richard (1992) “Between Cavatina and Overture: Opus 130 and the Voices of Narrative”, in Lockwood, Lewis and Webster, James (eds.) *Beethoven Forum*, vol. 1. p. 172

Detailed examination of each section demonstrates the incongruity across the structure of the work. The B flat fugue (bar 30) appears to present a simple resolution of the ambiguity of the Overtura: its dual themes are established (for the moment) as the “preferred” version of the fundamental “theme” by around bar 34. The internal structure of this fugue, however, produces two different levels of irony. The first of these arises from the relationship between its two themes. Lam considers the combination of these themes to be “very unclassical”;<sup>58</sup> the result of this combination is that the fugue “acquires from the interaction of macro- and micro-rhythms a controlled violence without parallel in music before the twentieth century”.<sup>59</sup>

Following Lam's observations it is possible to consider that an incongruous opposition occurs between the two themes on the level of rhythm, more specifically of meter. The rhythmic emphases of the two themes produce a metric contradiction: the dotted rhythm of the theme in the first violin strongly establishes the first and third beats of the bar; in contrast, the “motto” theme (Lam's term) in the viola is underscored by strong *sf* articulations, thereby emphasising the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> beats. The motto theme does not sound syncopated, rather as it progresses the heavy accents tend to subvert the rhythm of the contrasting theme, creating the effect of the main beat on beats 2 and 4.

The contradictory meters of the two themes produce the effect of rhythmic 'clashes' of the type that occurs in bar 39, where the entry of the contrasting subject, emphasising the 1st and 3rd beats, sounds incongruous with the preceding bars, which have effectively accented beats 2 and 4. This effect is even more pronounced from bar 111: the “motto” theme appears on the second quaver of the bar, creating even stronger rhythmic clashes with the contrasting theme. Similar rhythmic transformations occur towards the end of the section: the transformation of the main

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<sup>58</sup> Lam (1975) p. 109

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

theme into triplet rhythm in bar 138, for example, produces a clashing cross-rhythm effect with the diminution of the motto theme that occurs in the following bar.

Ex. 5.5 Op. 133  
(Fuga)

The musical score for Ex. 5.5 Op. 133 (Fuga) consists of two systems of staves. The first system covers measures 109 to 112, and the second system covers measures 112 to 115. The instruments are Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The time signature is common time (C). The score shows a complex rhythmic interplay between the instruments, with dynamic markings like *ff* and *f*. The first system shows measures 109 to 112, and the second system shows measures 112 to 115. The score is written for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello.

The thematic structure of the B flat fugue therefore already contains incongruity: the two themes are experienced as two rhythmically contradictory structures. The rhythmic incongruity of the two themes may be considered as an indicator of irony – their opposition produces the simultaneous presence of incongruous elements – the structure of irony given in the previous chapter.

Moreover, the incongruity of the two themes of this fugue is related to a second incongruity, a second level of irony arising from the opposition of this fugue to conventional procedures. As both Kerman and Chua observe, the harmonic structure and the process of the B flat fugue follow fugal conventions closely, indeed almost



too closely, not only in the exposition, but also throughout its course.<sup>60</sup> This remarkably tight fugal construction thus relates this fugue to conventional procedure.

However, whilst the underlying structure of the fugue may be entirely conventional, the effect of this structure is overwhelmingly unconventional. Throughout almost the entire fugue there is an unconventional emphasis on musical extremes: there is a constant forte dynamic, underscored by heavy *sf* accents producing a too-great emphasis; there are extremes of register and dissonance, particularly from bar 110, combined with wide leaps of both themes; there is an almost unbroken quaver pulse throughout which, together with the dotted rhythms of the contrasting theme a constant rhythmic momentum. In addition, the rhythmic incongruity that results from the combination of themes becomes increasingly extreme as the section proceeds, especially from bar 111 (see above, ex. 5.5). This rhythmic complexity is heightened by the dense texture that prevails – there is scarcely a bar that has less than three parts sounding.

This combination of musical extremes and rhythmic incongruity is outside both the “norms” of conventional fugal procedures, and even the stylistic norms of the other late quartets. As such, the cumulative effect of the musical extremes in this fugue are thoroughly unconventional, a viewpoint that perhaps explains Stravinsky’s description of the Grosse Fuge as “hardly birthmarked by its age”, an “absolutely contemporary piece of music that will be contemporary for ever”.<sup>61</sup> More importantly, the unconventional effect of the accumulation of extremes within this fugue is actually disturbing and almost bewildering: Lam describes its effect as “controlled violence” and as “terrifying”;<sup>62</sup> Kerman describes “harsh staggering accents . . . rhythmic fury . . . frantic diversions”;<sup>63</sup> Radcliffe recalls that the section has been described as “‘uncouth’, ‘rugged’ or ‘outlandish’”.<sup>64</sup> The combination of

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<sup>60</sup> See Kerman (1967) p. 279 and Chua (1995) p. 242

<sup>61</sup> Stravinsky, Igor and Craft, Robert (1982) *Dialogues* p. 124

<sup>62</sup> Lam (1975) p. 109/110

<sup>63</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 283

<sup>64</sup> Radcliffe (1965) p. 142

incongruous rhythmic elements, overly dense texture, extreme dissonance and chromaticism in this dysphoric fugue results in a systematic undermining of the stabilising elements of western music – harmony, rhythm and texture: the result is nothing short of musical chaos.

The unconventional, chaotic effect of the fugue produces a subtle incongruity within the context of its conventional underlying structure. This incongruity occurs initially between the thoroughly conventional fugal structure and the unconventional effect it produces – an opposition of musical order and musical chaos. However, it also functions between the extrageneric “topical” associations of these elements: the underlying order of the conventional harmonic and contrapuntal structure of this fugue may be considered to represent the “reason” of the learned style; this is opposed by the connotations of musical chaos that the extreme, dysphoric character of the music evokes. This opposition and incongruity produces irony: the B flat fugue is paradoxically both conventional and unconventional, highly ordered and entirely chaotic.

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A third incongruity occurs in relation to the B flat fugue: this incongruity arises as a result of the juxtaposition and extreme contrast of this fugue with the *Meno mosso* section that follows it. For example, the driving cross rhythms and metrical incongruity of the dual themes of the fugue are opposed to the rhythmic/metrical stability created by the simple meter and well-defined periodicity of the *Meno mosso*. Likewise, there is an extreme opposition of dynamics: the fugue was *forte* for such an extended period that the sudden *pianissimo* of the *Meno mosso* actually comes as something of a shock. Overall, the combination of slow tempo, major key, softer dynamic level and more lyrical melodic shaping in the *Meno mosso* is opposed to the loud, angular, dysphoric fugue. Crucially, this produces a significant opposition between topics: the more homophonic texture, and the lack of counterpoint in the *Meno mosso* are categorically “non-fugal” in nature, creating an opposition with the fugal, “learned style” topic of the preceding section.

Meno mosso e moderato

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

158 (Fuga) *sf* *ben tenuto* *pp*

162 *pp*

167 *sempre pp* *sempre pp*

Although these contrasts and oppositions are quite extreme, it is important to note that contrast alone is not enough to produce an incongruity – contrast is, after all, not unusual in Beethoven's music. Rather, the incongruity of these sections arises from the manner in which the transition between the sections is achieved: the *sf* G flat chord in bar 158 *interrupts* the progress of the fugue, whilst the fermata introduce, indeed force, a stasis that is completely incongruous with the context of its

overwhelming rhythmic momentum. This interruption of the fugue thus produces the effect, not simply of contrast, but rather of incongruity.<sup>65</sup>

It is certainly possible to regard the incongruous juxtaposition of the fugue and *Meno mosso* sections in the same manner as those seen in Op. 132; i.e. as a correlative of Romantic irony, or a juxtaposition of “serious” and “comic” genres of the type discussed by A. W. Schlegel. However, two factors make the incongruities of this movement a correlative of general, existential irony, rather than Romantic irony. The first of these is the simplest, and probably the most significant. As was discussed in relation to the *Overtura*, there is a clear thematic relationship between the two sections – they are manifestations of the same thematic nucleus. However, the incongruous juxtaposition of these sections creates a paradoxical situation where different versions of the same theme are forced into an opposition: they are both the same and contrasting simultaneously.

Secondly, like the *Cavatina* movement that originally preceded the *Grosse Fuge*, both of these incongruously juxtaposed sections are internally congruent. There is, in other words, no contravention of the conventions of these sections, no ironic manipulation of their conventions to produce parody or satire. Whilst it is relatively easy to demonstrate the congruence of the *Meno mosso* section – its texture, dynamic levels, tonality and thematic structure remain entirely consistent throughout – it would appear, in contrast, to be harder to demonstrate the congruence of the fugue: as has already been considered, it produces two levels of irony within itself.

Nevertheless, it is important to consider that, although the fugue is harshly dissonant, extreme, chaotic, and even terrifying, it is entirely consistent throughout. In other words the work-specific conventions of the section are not contravened or ironically manipulated in the manner in which those within Op. 132 (particularly the dance movements) were. There is, in short no parabasis, no authorial intrusion *within* the

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<sup>65</sup> Note that the fact that the *Meno mosso* section follows this fermata, in the same key, with the same reduction in dynamic etc establishes a semantic connection: the G flat chord is part of the *Meno mosso*; it is clearly the *Meno mosso* that interrupts the fugue.

structure of this first fugue. Rather, the irony that occurs within this fugue forms one of its conventions. From its beginning both the incongruity that arises from the combination of themes and the incongruity between the fugal structure and its effect (the opposition of order and chaos) produce irony. Crucially, though, this irony is maintained consistently throughout the section – it therefore forms one of the conventions of the structure, part of the aesthetic of the first fugue. The significance of this is that, in Schlegel's terms, the irony present in the B flat fugue forms its "system". In contrast to the Romantic irony of the Op. 132 quartet, here the irony does not intrude in a process of parabasis, rather it is present throughout as a convention; this first fugue expresses irony as a subject, through its structure.

Thus the juxtaposition that occurs between the B flat fugue and the *Meno mosso* section occurs as an opposition of two incongruous musical structures, each of which is internally congruent. The irony therefore exists, as it were, in the spaces between the sections: the incongruous juxtaposition – the intrusion of the *Meno mosso* into the fugue – may therefore be understood as an objectification of the artifice of *both* of the incongruous elements. This creates a structural paradox that, as considered above, may be correlated with the paradoxes of general irony: it is an expression of existential irony.

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The technique of the incongruous juxtaposition of internally congruent structures is repeated several more times throughout the structure of the *Grosse Fuge*. Each juxtaposition contributes to the ironic structure of the whole, producing a continual chain of ironic incongruities. The introduction of the "*Allegro molto e con brio*" section (bar 233), for example, produces an ironic juxtaposition of "serious" and "comic" topics;<sup>66</sup> this dance section, like the two preceding sections is internally congruent, producing the same type of juxtaposition seen between the B flat fugue and the *Meno mosso*. The incongruity of this juxtaposition is again achieved through

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<sup>66</sup> Although this section is not humorous, as such, nevertheless the "light-hearted" nature of this section is opposed to the serious character of both the *Meno mosso* and, in particular, the first fugue.



the transition between sections: the suddenness of the fortissimo chord, followed by the completely contrasting music of the Allegro molto produces an incongruous juxtaposition. As Kerman states, “the blatancy of its [the dance-like section] return to the original tonal area is accentuated by its incongruity of tone”.<sup>67</sup>

Ex. 5.7 Op. 133

231 (Meno mosso e moderato) Allegro molto e con brio

Violin I pp ff fp

Violin II pp ff fp

Viola pp ff fp

Violoncello pp ff fp

The incongruity of the juxtaposition of the Allegro molto and the second large fugal section of the movement, the A flat fugue, is particularly sudden and unexpected.

Ex. 5.8 Op. 133

270 (Allegro molto e con brio)

Violin I cresc. ff

Violin II cresc. ff

Viola cresc. ff

Violoncello cresc. ff sf sf sf

278 f ff sf

ben marcato

<sup>67</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 288



The Allegro molto dance has barely been established, consisting of only 36 bars, before the rhythmic momentum is interrupted and halted altogether by the fortissimo A flat chord in bar 272. This sudden stasis is unexpected: rhythmically, it is incongruous with the prevailing dance topic; harmonically it rather cuts across the prevailing B flat tonality.<sup>68</sup> This alone produces the effect of an interruption, but the extreme opposition that occurs between the soft, lyrical topic of the Allegro molto and the second fugue (in A flat) that follows heightens this incongruity. Kerman describes this fugue as “as acrid and furious and extensive as the B flat fugue, and as incessantly loud”:<sup>69</sup> the opposition of this violent fugue to the preceding dance produces an incongruous juxtaposition as great as any in the work.

The A flat fugue, like all of the other sections of the work, is internally congruent; this congruence, however, is like that of the first fugue – it actually contains an ironic structure. Into this fugue Beethoven introduces thematic processes and modulatory progressions that are more reminiscent of the development of a sonata than of fugal technique. After the exposition (bars 273 to 308) the harmonic course of the fugue, for example, comprises extended modulatory passages based on circle of fifths progressions: the first (bars 308 - 328) takes the theme from C to E flat, a process repeated in bars 350 – 366; in between there is another modulatory fifths passage based upon the trill figure from the end of the first statement of the theme in bar 10

<sup>68</sup> Although the A flat – diminished motion of the previous two chords does, to a certain extent, prepare the A flat chord one could not really term this a modulation. In the context, this therefore A flat occurs as an interruption of one tonality by another.

<sup>69</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 288/9

of the Overtura. This passage completes the circle of fifths begun in bar 308, proceeding from A flat back to C for the re-entry of the theme in bar 350.

Throughout this fugue Beethoven treats the theme developmentally, fragmenting it, developing the separate elements and recombining them in new ways. From bar 377 through to 400, for example, there is an extraordinary ascending passage constructed from a fragment of the opening of the theme in canonical entries between cello and viola. Over this the first violin plays trills, derived from the end of the theme, whilst the second violin adds a figure derived from a diminution of the opening three notes of the theme.

Ex. 5.9 Op. 133  
(Allegro molto e con brio)

The musical score for Example 5.9, Op. 133, (Allegro molto e con brio) shows measures 377-400. The score is for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 8/8. The score features a complex ascending passage with trills and sf markings. The Violoncello part starts with a trill in measure 377, followed by a series of ascending notes. The Viola part also features a trill in measure 377, followed by a series of ascending notes. The Violin I part features a trill in measure 377, followed by a series of ascending notes. The Violin II part features a trill in measure 377, followed by a series of ascending notes. The score is marked with 'sf' (sforzando) in measures 381, 385, 389, and 393. The score ends with a double bar line in measure 400.

Similarly, the second section of the fugue, in E flat (bars 414 - 452), takes the diminution of the theme as its subject, combining it with the second subject of the B flat fugue. Again, this section pursues a descending modulation process, until the

cadence gestures of bars 450-453. The final section of the fugue, following these cadential gestures, combines the elements already developed with figures based on the inversions both of the theme and the countersubject.

Ex. 5.10 Op. 133

The musical score for Ex. 5.10 Op. 133 is presented in two systems. The first system includes staves for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The second system includes staves for Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., and Vc. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 8/8. The score features various dynamic markings: *sf* (sforzando), *ff* (fortissimo), and *p* (piano). Measures 410 and 420 are specifically marked at the beginning of the first and second systems, respectively. The notation includes slurs, ties, and various rhythmic values.

This development and manipulation of the fugue subject, together with the modulatory harmonic processes, strongly suggests the type of sonata procedures seen in Beethoven's own development technique, rather than conventional fugal technique. This duality could be understood as an opposition of the fugal structure with a distinctly non-fugal technique; if so, then the A flat fugue, like the B flat fugue, contains an incongruity within its structure, an opposition of fugal and non-fugal conventions simultaneously. In both cases, however, the structural incongruities, whilst unconventional in stylistic terms, nevertheless form the conventions of the respective sections and are maintained consistently throughout.

Thus, if there is irony in the structure of this A flat fugue, it occurs as one of its conventions, rather than as an intrusive “authorial” manipulation.

The introduction of non-fugal, developmental techniques in this fugue indicates an interesting issue with regard to this whole movement. Kerman considers that Beethoven’s use of fugue in the late works in general may be attributed to a search for alternatives to sonata form.<sup>70</sup> However, neither of the large fugal sections in this work are able to bear the unconventional processes they are subjected to. As Chua states, the fugal texture “is unable to assimilate the dynamic contrast and synthesis of sonata form . . . without the implicative power of development, there is only a fractured structure of contrasts”.<sup>71</sup> Whereas sonata form can accommodate such contrasts stylistically, the oppositions and processes of this movement violate the ‘norms’ of even the freest fugal technique. As such they are stylistically incongruous, and hence all the more striking. It may be, therefore, that Beethoven chose fugue for this finale precisely because it cannot sustain the extreme juxtapositions and oppositions of the movement: this incongruity foregrounds the oppositions within the movement in order to force the perception of paradox and irony upon the listener.

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The A flat fugue, and the transformation of the *Meno mosso* section that follows introduce, via the cadential gestures, a closural signification for the first time in the entire movement. This closure is, however, problematic – it does not occur in the tonic key. This prompts two possible interpretations: these cadences could either be a Haydnesque misleading, an ironic manipulation of the expectations of the listener in the manner of the “Surprise” Symphony or, alternatively, they could simply gesture towards the closure of one section of the work - a pivotal structural moment. (This second possibility is supported by the fact that the tonal ambiguity of the

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid. p. 273

<sup>71</sup> Chua (1995) p. 242



Overtura prevented any stable tonal centre being established at the beginning of the work.)

Regardless of which way these cadences are interpreted, the closural signification that results produces an important effect, introducing an expectation of the impending end of the work. Moreover, from this point there begins a recurrence of previous material, in forms that are clearly transformations of their first occurrences. The return of the *Meno mosso* section, for example, involves a transposition to A flat, together with a substantial increase in dynamic level and the introduction of accented crotchet motion that produces a more homophonic texture. The effect of this transformation is to minimise the contrast between the *Meno mosso* and the A flat fugue. Thus whilst there is still an abrupt shift of topic between bars 492/493, the consistency of key and dynamics etc. makes this far less striking than the previous juxtapositions. In other words this new version of the *Meno mosso* has actually become to a large extent congruent with the fugue.

Crucially, this process continues the implication of sonata procedures that have occurred earlier: the combination of thematic return and transformation, following the “closural” gestures in the A flat fugue produces a recapitulatory effect. Moreover, this process extends to subsequent contrasts between sections: like that between the fugue and the *Meno mosso*, subsequent contrasts no longer create incongruous juxtapositions. Rather, their incongruity has been negated because they have, to a certain extent, become an expected convention of the music. They are no longer incongruities – as recapitulation they have (perhaps paradoxically) become congruent.

(Allegro molto e con brio) Meno mosso e moderato

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

489

495

For example, within this context even the sudden tonal ambiguity of the passage from bar 511 to 530, which interrupts the continuity of the preceding sections, has the effect of a recapitulation: it mirrors the tonal ambiguity of the Overtura. Similarly, although the return of the Allegro dance in bar 532 might have been considered to represent the same incongruous juxtaposition between serious, quasi-rhetorical gestures and the lighter, “comic” style of the dance that occurred on the first appearance of this material, nevertheless the return of this dance is experienced as recapitulation. The extension of this dance, which was initially interrupted by the A flat fugue, produces an extended section in the tonic, underlining the recapitulatory, closural effect of the passage and removing the incongruity of the initial juxtaposition.

Even the seeming interruption by the relative stasis of the thematic statement at bar 609 does not produce incongruity. Rather, since the juxtaposition of contrasting sections has become a convention of the movement it functions in a recapitulatory manner – the element of incongruity is lost.

## Ex. 5.12 Op. 133

(Meno mosso e moderato)

511 *poco a poco sempre piu allegro ed accelerando il tempo*

Violin I *f* *dim.* *p*

Violin II *f* *dim.* *p*

Viola *f* *dim.* *p*

Cello *f* *dim.* *p*

*f poco a poco sempre piu allegro ed accelerando il tempo*

530

Vln. I *piu p* *pp*

Vln. II *piu p* *pp*

Vla. *piu p* *pp*

Vc. *piu p* *pp*

*Allegro molto e con brio*

Vln. I *fp* *tr.*

Vln. II *pp* *fp* *tr.*

Vla. *fp*

Vc. *fp*

The final sections of the movement (from bar 656), however, restore the full force of the incongruities of the preceding structure, bringing them into even greater prominence. The passage from the end of the Allegro molto dance section through to the final, climactic statement of the theme has deep significance for the entire structure of the movement – it functions as a recapitulation of the Overtura section,

the climactic moment of several of the movement's most important processes. Kerman's comments on these bars are insightful:

Beethoven is still stressing the paradox. The themes have all been pulled together - fantastically different as they can still be heard to be. They have provided material for an extraordinary, coherent structure - grotesque as they still sound in bare juxtaposition . . . At the end of the A flat fugue, thematic versions from earlier in the composition return to make a climactic recapitulation. But the way this is managed does not seem calculated to reconcile all the manifestations of the basic theme; it has the effect, once again, of stressing their paradoxical co-existence in the same universe.<sup>72</sup>

This section, however, does not simply stress the paradox "once again" – rather it is the point of the greatest incongruity in the entire work. The two thematic fragments in bars 657 to 662 evoke, or more accurately, signify the whole of the sections that they were previously part of. These bars effectively establish semantic and thematic connections with these sections; one part of the section, when occurring in a different context, comes to signify the whole. Consequently the incongruous juxtaposition of sections seen throughout the whole movement is invoked in these few bars. Crucially, the fact that these fragments occur in an even more truncated form than the original Overtura forces the structure of the whole movement into an even more extreme juxtaposition than occurred throughout the movement. The result of this is a foregrounding of the process of incongruous juxtaposition, of the paradox of the entire movement.

It is also at this point that the incongruity of the original Overtura is most clearly seen. With the context of the whole movement as it were "behind" it, the truncated recapitulation produces a re-evaluation of the Overtura. This re-evaluation underlines the incongruity and irony of the opening of the movement – it is at this point that the paradox and irony of the Overtura, which are expanded through the entire movement, is most clearly perceived.

The final version of the theme, the Allegro molto e con brio section from bar 662 has a profound effect upon the structure of the movement. This version of the theme is

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<sup>72</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 278/9

the most powerful in the work, forming a massive climactic statement that extends the theme beyond any of the previous versions. Moreover it seems to form, as it were, a “definitive” version, a summation of the thematic process of the entire movement. Considering this, the unfolding of the Grosse Fuge could be considered a reversal of conventional thematic and musical processes, proceeding from the fragmentation and development of the theme towards a single, unified statement.

Ex. 5.13 Op. 133

(Allegro molto e con brio)

649

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

656

Allegro

Meno mosso e moderato

662

Allegro molto e con brio

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system, starting at measure 649, is for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. It is marked '(Allegro molto e con brio)' and features a melodic line in the strings with dynamics *f*, *dim.*, *p*, and *più p*. The second system, starting at measure 656, shows a change in tempo and dynamics, with 'Allegro' and 'Meno mosso e moderato' markings, and dynamics *pp* and *ff*. The third system, starting at measure 662, returns to '(Allegro molto e con brio)' and features a more complex, rhythmic texture with dynamics *ff* and *sf*.

Such an interpretation of this moment would suggest that this version of the theme is a goal or a terminus. Moreover, this end-point would finish the ongoing process of objectification that has occurred throughout the movement, with the final version of the theme emerging as, in some sense, an “authentic” version. It would, in other



words, constitute the objectification within the movement as a finite process by “preferring” this final version of the theme.

This interpretation, however, is weakened in two ways. Firstly, the recapitulation of the Overtura seems to preclude the interpreting the paradoxes of this movement as “finite”. This recapitulation proceeds in reverse order: starting from the recapitulation of the theme of the B flat fugue the music progresses through the Meno mosso theme (which occurs before the double fugue themes in the original Overtura) towards a powerful unison theme. This reversal of the original order implies a certain circularity of structure, a thematic symmetry across the movement. As was seen in the Cavatina, the circular nature of this structure implies an infinite movement, a continuous chain of irony.

Secondly, (and more importantly) this “infinite” motion is continued through the succession of rapid juxtapositions that follow this overwhelming, climactic “final” theme to the very end of the work. The climax is initially juxtaposed with elements from the light-hearted, “comic” dance sections (bar 680/681), an effect repeated by the juxtaposition of the pianissimo restatement of the theme in bar 689 with the cadential gestures of the dance section (bars 702 to 716).

Ex. 5.14 Op. 133

(Allegro molto e con brio)

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

678

*f*

*dim.*

*p*

*più p*

*p*

*più p*

*sf*

*dim.*

*p*

*più p*



As with the recurrence of the thematic fragments in bars 657 to 662, these “dance” elements signify the earlier sections of the work; significantly, their juxtaposition therefore produces the same type of serious – comic contrasts that occurs elsewhere in the movement.<sup>73</sup> These juxtapositions continue the process of objectification that has been functioning throughout the entire work. In particular, the juxtaposition of the climactic theme with lighter “comic” elements creates an ironic incongruity similar to that seen, for example, between the powerful climactic final statement of the Heiliger Dankgesang and the comedic Alla Marcia of Op. 132. Here, as in the earlier example, this incongruous juxtaposition undermines the “climactic” effect of the final theme, revealing its inherent artifice: despite the dynamic and thematic power of this moment, the climax actually becomes objectified. Within this context even the final cadences sound somewhat inauthentic: they seem almost imposed upon the work, conventional devices of closure seem, like those of the coda of Op. 95, to be incongruous within the context.

<sup>73</sup> As Nicholas Marston states, the recurrence of the dance section in these bars may be understood as “connotating a lighter, even humorous vein”. Marston, Nicholas (2000) ““The Sense of an Ending”: Goal-Directedness in Beethoven’s Music” in Stanley, Glenn (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Beethoven* p. 97

The circularity of the structure, the final rapid juxtapositions (which continue the process of the movement through to its end) and the undermined ending imply that the paradox and objectification within this movement are not finite, ending with one “preferred” element, “meaning” or version of the theme. Rather, whilst the Cavatina expressed one simple, incongruous juxtaposition the Grosse Fuge may be understood as an expansion of this paradox on a massive scale. It produces (or implies) a circular, “infinite” structure of incongruously juxtaposed elements, each of which was seen to be internally congruent. This produces irony on two levels. Firstly, each of the subsections is objectified by the incongruity of the juxtapositions, an ongoing ironic objectification of the artifice of each of these sections. Secondly, the thematic relationship between the juxtaposed elements produces a fundamental paradox: the elements are incongruous, yet they all derive from the same thematic nucleus i.e. simultaneously the same and different, simultaneously art and artifice.

From this viewpoint this “infinite” paradoxical structure may be understood to correlate to the perception of the paradox of existence that is seen within general, existential irony and that also forms the basis for Schlegel’s philosophy of irony and “transcendental poetry”. As such, this movement, together with the Cavatina may be understood ultimately as manifestations of the “new mode” of irony that Kierkegaard identifies in Schlegel, Tieck and Solger: they are “subjectivity’s subjectivity”, “reflection’s reflection”, a continual, infinite paradox that mirrors the fundamental paradoxes of life and art. Together they may be understood, in short, as infinite, absolute paradoxes, powerful evocations of the paradox of general, existential irony.

## Satire: the Replacement Finale

*"Naivety is, or is what appears to be . . . Classical to the point of irony".<sup>1</sup>*

Friedrich Schlegel

The assertion in the preceding chapters that the Op. 132 and 130/133 quartets can be understood in terms of paradox and Romantic irony allows a new interpretation of a perennial problem. The replacement of the original finale of the Op. 130 quartet – the Grosse Fuge – with a new Allegro finale, the last movement that Beethoven completed, is one of the most singular and curious events in the composer's biography. That this substitution was made at the behest of the publisher Artaria with, it would appear, relatively little resistance from Beethoven makes it even more astonishing: at no other time did Beethoven as a mature composer allow external pressures or opinion to direct the course of his composition. That he appeared to do so in this situation, with a work so staggering in its originality and scope as the Grosse Fuge, makes the event all the more significant.

The uniqueness of this incident has meant that virtually everyone who has written about Beethoven has apparently been compelled to make some attempt to account for it. Indeed, the replacement of the Grosse Fuge with the alternate Allegro finale seems to produce a particular problem for commentators on the quartets. As Kerman points out, the viewpoint that one takes towards this singular event has a tendency to be coloured by which of the alternatives one considers to be the 'best', or the 'most fitting'.<sup>2</sup> As will be seen, it also depends, to a great extent, upon the manner in which Beethoven is viewed, both as composer and as a human being.

The viewpoint proposed here is that the replacement of the Grosse Fuge is a fundamentally ironic act: far from being an accession to public taste or an admission of

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<sup>1</sup> Schlegel (1991) *Athenaeum* fragment 51 p. 24

shortcomings in the original Fugue, the replacement finale is satirical in function. As will be seen, this movement is constructed in an exaggeratedly conventional manner, and is comprised largely of musical banalities and clichés. This results in an objectification of musical conventionality that will be considered to reflect a satirical comment upon the limited, conventional viewpoint of those who could not accept the original finale. From this viewpoint it is tempting to liken Beethoven's irony to that of Socrates: in this movement the wisest man of his age satirically objectifies, through his "ignorance", the prejudices and folly of his contemporaries.

Moreover, this interpretation of the replacement finale places it within the context of the original quartet. As some commentators have noted, after Op. 130 Beethoven appears to have moved on to other concerns: Kerman, for example, relates the Op. 131 quartet to the notion of "integration", setting up an antithesis between this work and Op. 130. More significantly, for the current work, Daverio considers the C# minor quartet in relation to Friedrich Schlegel's conception of the fragment.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, considering this replacement in terms of satire represents a return to the concerns of the earlier works: Beethoven returns to irony, replacing one ironic finale with another.

Certain elements of this viewpoint may be found in Ivan Mahaim's *Beethoven: Naissance et Renaissance des Derniers Quatuors*. Mahaim suggests that financial pressures and the attempted suicide of Beethoven's nephew effectively broke the composer:

Que lui importait maintenant, quelques mois avant de disparaître, de séparer la Grande Fugue de son XIII<sup>e</sup> quatuor et de lui substituer un autre finale? – L'avenir lui paraissait si lointain et si incertain qui la verrait revivre à la salle de concert, et reprendre sa place authentique. Le présent, pour lui, c'était la «réconciliation» avant le départ définitif de «son fils» chéri . . . séparation qui signifiait la faillite de ses aspirations affectives les plus impérieuses . . . on leur composera le finale-postiche, à «ces bœufs», à «ces ânes».

(What did it matter to him now, a few months before his death, if he separated the Great

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<sup>2</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 368

<sup>3</sup> Daverio (2000) p. 159/160



Fugue from his quartet and substituted another finale? The future, which would see the Fugue live again in the concert hall, and resume its authentic place, seemed to him distant and uncertain. The present, for him, was the period of "reconciliation" before the final departure of his dear "son" . . . the separation which signified the bankruptcy of his most imperious emotional aspirations . . . He would compose a finale-pastiche for them, those "cattle", those "asses").<sup>4</sup>

Mahaim does not, however, expand upon the "pastiche" element that he perceives in the replacement finale: instead, he describes the character of the movement in comedic terms such as "un petit poney" or "le clown".<sup>5</sup> Beyond this, he refers to the movement as "all exuberance, carelessness, lightness, a fair-ground humour or a pastoral tenderness"<sup>6</sup> and considers that it returns to a style reminiscent of either Beethoven's own earliest compositions, or of his predecessors.<sup>7</sup>

It would seem, however, that Mahaim uses the term "pastiche" to indicate a 'mask' or a 'persona' adopted by Beethoven:

Lorsqu'il a composé la Grande Fugue, il était dans toute la force de son imagination créatrice, édifiant le gigantesque monument de la Trilogie. La Grande Fugue après la Cavatine, c'est une victoire, et c'est bien l'impression qu'elle fait lorsqu'on est familiarisé avec tous ses contrastes, l'ampleur de son architecture, la permanence du grand thème symbolique . . . Le Rondo ce n'est pas une victoire, mais ce n'est pas une vraie détente; c'est l'oeuvre d'un Beethoven résigné, malheureux . . . Le Rondo caché, sous éphémère déguisement, les désespérances de son Coeur meurtri, de son courage abattu, de sa résignation; il cache les premiers signes de sa dernière maladie:

Je suis las, la joie m'a quitté pour longtemps. Tous mes espoirs s'effondrent.

(When he composed the Great Fugue, he was building the gigantic monument of the Trilogy in the full force of his creative imagination. The Great Fugue, coming after the Cavatina, is a victory, and that is the impression that it makes when one becomes familiar with all its contrasts, the width of its architecture, the permanence of the broad symbolic theme. The Rondo is not a victory, but it is not a true relaxation; it is the work of a resigned, unhappy Beethoven . . . The Rondo hides, under an ephemeral disguise, the despairs of his bruised Heart, his demoralised courage, his resignation; it hides the first signs of his last disease:

<sup>4</sup> Mahaim, Ivan (1964) *Beethoven: Naissance et Renaissance des Derniers Quatuors* p. 427, trans. Kerman (1967) p. 369

<sup>5</sup> Mahaim (1964) p. 430

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Unless otherwise indicated all translations are the present authors.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

I am tired, the joy left me for a long time. All my hopes break down.)<sup>8</sup>

This conception of the finale comes close to that expressed here. The process of dissembling that is inherent in the adoption of a mask or persona is, as Muecke observes, an intrinsic element of irony, forming part of the original meaning of the Greek *eironeia*<sup>9</sup>. In such a process the ironist pretends to be other than he is in order to win an advantage over an adversary. Therefore, in considering this movement as such a “disguise” Mahaim invokes this quality of deception in his designation of pastiche. However, his attribution of “heroism” to the Rondo seems to preclude the ironic element implied by the use of the term ‘pastiche’:

Miracle d'héroïsme de provoquer la joie et la gaieté quand l'âme est noyée de chagrin, prête à défaillir. C'était le miracle de Mozart, et c'est celui du Rondo de Beethoven. (To force joy and cheerfulness when the soul is drowning sorrow, ready to faint is a miracle of heroism. It was the miracle of Mozart, and it is that of the Rondo of Beethoven.)<sup>10</sup>

The inherent artifice of a “pastiche” or a mask would undermine genuine heroism: Beethoven's response is not a genuine heroism, or a genuine joy, but an artistic device adopted for purely satirical purposes. Mahaim's use of the term “pastiche” therefore seems to relate simply to the difference between Beethoven's personal circumstances at the time of the composition of the Rondo and the actual character of the piece.

In addition, Mahaim views the replacement Rondo finale as incongruous with the rest of the Op. 130 quartet: he considers the replacement of the Fugue a “mutilation”<sup>11</sup> of the Thirteenth quartet, an act of despair prompted by illness and a largely imaginary poverty. As such, the “disguise” adopted by Beethoven in the Rondo is purely for the purpose of self-preservation, in order to hide his own pain, grief, and disappointment. Crucially however, Mahaim never actually explains how this finale manages to mask

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 432/433

<sup>9</sup> Muecke (1970) p. 14/15

<sup>10</sup> Mahaim (1964) p. 430

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Beethoven's supposed sadness, nor does he demonstrate such a function within the movement itself.

The viewpoint proposed here differs somewhat from Mahaim's. He demonstrates incongruities between both this movement and the rest of the quartet, and between the character of the Rondo and Beethoven's frame of mind at the time of its composition. In the present work the incongruities that create the satirical purport of this movement will be seen to occur *within* the structure of the movement.

Moreover, the replacement finale is not viewed as an act of passive acceptance or despair. Rather, it will be considered as simultaneously a satirical broadside at those who would not, or could not accept the original version of the Op. 130 quartet and an eloquent defence of the Grosse Fuge. Although there is, due to its satirical nature, an element of the "disguise" common to all forms of satire, this persona is adopted not as a defensive mechanism but as a form of ironic attack. Moreover this persona is not a simple "mocking" of stylised elements, as is, to an extent, implied by the designation of "pastiche": it is an ironic comment on musical conventionality and banality that objectifies not only musical anachronisms but also the conservative tastes of Beethoven's critics.

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## Historical and Critical context

Critical attempts to explain the replacement of the Grosse Fuge normally involve an account of the external conditions in which the replacement of the finale occurred. The first of these is the financial compensation that the replacement would garner: Beethoven was to receive a fee from Artaria for the replacement, as well as for the separate publication of the Fuge. The financial recompense for the work is certainly a plausible motivation for the replacement: the figures involved were not inconsiderable –

they would have provided for his living expenses for a month. However, this possibility is usually rejected outright: the sanctity of Beethoven's reputation seems to preclude the possibility that the alteration of the finale was undertaken purely for financial gain.<sup>12</sup>

This explanation, however, is perhaps more plausible than most commentators would like to believe. Although Beethoven was renowned for his artistic integrity, the romanticised view of him as unconcerned with worldly matters simply doesn't hold: he made a living from his art, and specifically from publishing his works. Indeed, as may be seen from his correspondence, Beethoven was financially astute; at times his negotiations with his publishers border on the Machiavellian. His supposed poverty and financial pressures may therefore have lent weight to the suggestion of the replacement.

This is all the more likely given the exceptional personal circumstances in which Beethoven found himself immediately prior to the composition of the Allegro movement. Once again, his health was deteriorating, undoubtedly affecting his emotional well-being. In addition, he was profoundly affected by the attempted suicide of his nephew Karl, as attested to by his correspondence with his close friend Karl Holz.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps due to the struggle for custody that Beethoven had with Karl's mother, this relationship was, at least for the composer, a significant one: Karl embodied Beethoven's paternal hopes and aspirations, and he invested a great deal of emotional energy in the relationship. It has therefore been suggested that these two factors were involved in Beethoven's compliance with the publisher Artaria: he was so emotionally drained that he had little energy left to refuse, or was more easily swayed than normal.

However, as Kerman insists, against all of these circumstantial factors must be placed the huge artistic self-consciousness and integrity of Beethoven, as both composer and man. He, along with many other commentators, arrives at the conclusion that

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Cooper (2000) p. 345 and Kerman (1967) p. 369/70.

<sup>13</sup> "All my hopes have vanished . . . all my hopes of having near me someone who would resemble me at least in my better qualities!" Quoted in Solomon (1978) p. 395/6

Beethoven, normally so tenacious, if not downright stubborn when it came to the subject of his own work, would only have replaced the Fugue if he came to see that there was something intrinsically wrong either with its own structure, or with its place within the Op. 130 quartet. In other words, the substitution occurred purely on aesthetic grounds, even if other external pressures mediated this decision.

Kerman states that he is “inclined to take Beethoven’s replacement of the Fugue as an acknowledgement (however, reluctant, bad-tempered, greedy, etc.) that he saw something wrong with the way it sat in the quartet”,<sup>14</sup> and that the act of replacement “can be taken as a sign of self-doubt and self-exasperation and resentment that other people kept telling him what he knew better himself”.<sup>15</sup> Daverio supports Kerman’s viewpoint, suggesting that Beethoven came to consider that the Grosse Fuge makes the whole quartet unbalanced, shifting the emotional and discursive ‘weight’ too much towards the finale, thereby “dwarfing” the preceding movements. According to him, the replacement of the Grosse Fuge therefore “demonstrates a genuine concern for proportion – and also for generic propriety”.<sup>16</sup> (It is interesting to note that other writers have considered this as grounds for retaining the Grosse Fuge, in preference to the Allegro, arguing that the whole compositional trajectory of the quartet is end-orientated, and that without the Fugue there is no ‘closure’ to the work.)<sup>17</sup>

The argument for an aesthetic reason for the replacement of the Grosse Fuge is perhaps strengthened by the fact that Beethoven had previously composed alternative movements for several other major works – the Ninth Symphony and the *Waldstein* sonata being the most prominent examples. The replacement of the finale of the Op. 130 quartet was not, therefore without precedent in a major work. However, there is a

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<sup>14</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 370

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Daverio (2000) p. 164

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Kropfinger, Klaus (1987) ‘Das gespaltene Werk – Beethovens Streichquartett Op. 130/133’ in Brandenburg, Sieghard and Loos, Helmut (eds.), *Beiträge zu Beethovens Kammermusik*, Kinderman (1995) p. 303/304 and Kramer (1992)



crucial difference in the case of the *Grosse Fuge*: the replacement was introduced after the first performance, when it had already been sold to a publisher and was already actually engraved. In the cases of the other works the replacement movements were undoubtedly made entirely as a result of an artistic decision by the composer, with no external collusion, prior to performance and publication. The fact that this was not the case with the replacement of the *Grosse Fuge* tends to undermine the argument for an aesthetic basis for the decision.

Indeed, I consider that the view that the substitution of the Fugue was aesthetically motivated is inherently problematic: it seems likely that Beethoven, had he truly considered the *Grosse Fuge* to be flawed would have undertaken a revision prior to both performance and publication, as in the other cases cited. The fact that there is no indication of any intention to do so may therefore be taken, however tentatively, as evidence that he saw no need for such a revision.

Even more compelling is Beethoven's response to the reception of the *Grosse Fuge* at its first performance. The audience reportedly demanded a repeat performance of the *Tedesca* and the *Cavatina* – the Fugue, however, was not well received. It was heavily criticised for its difficulties and, in the days following was even described as being like “a sort of Chinese puzzle” in its incomprehensibility<sup>18</sup>. Beethoven, who had remained absent from the concert, residing instead at a nearby inn was, of all the movements, most concerned with the reception of the Fugue. When Holz informed him of the success of only the middle movements he was reportedly furious that the fugue had not been well received, and described the audience as “cattle” and “asses”.<sup>19</sup>

It is clear from this response that the *Grosse Fuge* was, for Beethoven, a movement of particular importance within a quartet that, according to Kinderman, was known as his

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<sup>18</sup> Solomon (1978) p. 443

<sup>19</sup> Mahaim (1964) p. 419

'Liebquartett'.<sup>20</sup> Holz, charged by the publisher Artaria with the difficult task of persuading Beethoven to provide a replacement for the Fugue, also attests to this fact. According to him, Beethoven was profoundly reluctant to remove the Grosse Fuge from the quartet: "[He] held tight to the Fugue, and was persuaded only with difficulty to separate it from the quartet".<sup>21</sup> This reluctance, around six months after the first performance of the Op. 130 quartet, seems to oppose the viewpoint that Beethoven perceived problems with the movement in retrospect, and was therefore persuaded to replace it.

The issue of the importance of the Fugue for Beethoven appears to be closely related to the genesis of this movement, an issue that is greatly debated. This debate centres upon whether or not the Grosse Fuge was the generating impulse of the quartet, or indeed whether it was ever a part of the 'original' conception: according to Klaus Kropfinger, the Fugue was, from the beginning, integral to the conception of the quartet, its theme having been sketched during the composition of Op. 132;<sup>22</sup> Bekker agrees, considering that "The final fugue . . . gathers up all the parts [the preceding movements] in itself and makes a unity of the work".<sup>23</sup> Cooper argues, in contrast, that this was not the case, and that the Fugue was a relatively late addition, forming an "intrusion"<sup>24</sup> into the work. Although Chua clearly considers that the Grosse Fuge forms an integral part of the original 'Galitzin' version of the Op. 130 quartet,<sup>25</sup> Warren Kirkendale considers that the Fugue is, like Bach's 'Art of Fugue' a compendium of fugal technique and, as such, may quite naturally be detached from its original place within the Op. 130 quartet.<sup>26</sup> Significantly, almost all of the writers cited (and there are many more) use their

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<sup>20</sup> Kinderman (1995) p. 304

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Kerman (1967) p. 368

<sup>22</sup> Kropfinger (1987) pp. 304 - 315

<sup>23</sup> Bekker (1925) p. 332

<sup>24</sup> Cooper (1990) p. 214

<sup>25</sup> Chua (1995) p. 269, note 21, quoted below.

<sup>26</sup> Kirkendale, Warren (1963) "The 'Great Fugue', Op. 133: Beethoven's 'Art of Fugue'", *Acta Musicologica*, vol. XXXV p. 14-24

argument concerning the genesis of the Fugue to support their respective preferences of finale.

This issue seems vital in that, if the Fugue was either the generating impulse of the whole quartet, or even just an essential part of the original conception, then its removal constitutes nothing less than a 'violation', with the replacement as a completely foreign insertion. If, on the other hand, the Fugue is itself an aberration, then its removal is an acceptable solution to an aesthetic dilemma. However, this issue is of little importance to the current discussion. The important point, rather, is that the Fugue did, at one point, exist as the finale to the quartet, with the result that the relationship established between this movement and those preceding it results, in the 'Galitzin' version, in an "end-weighting" of an extraordinary degree – the Fugue is both the aim and the summation of the entire quartet.

This relationship – the original trajectory of the work – is problematic, for those who, like Kerman, consider the replacement of the Fugue as a reaction to some aesthetic shortcoming. The alternative finale simply does not fulfil the function of a finale in the manner of the *Grosse Fuge*: it can neither bear the weight of the entire quartet, nor encompass the diversity of the preceding five movements. Rather, it seems, as Cooper observes, to belong to a different, 'lighter' aesthetic:

A comparison with Op. 135, which it superficially resembles in many ways, will reveal how close Beethoven came in the op. 130 finale to the contracted scope and vision of Biedermeier art. If the first and last movements of op. 135 do indeed represent a contraction of scope and a reduction of visionary power compared with the preceding quartets, they still retain potency of a different kind. The harmless, gelded quality that is characteristic of Biedermeier art is hardly found even in Beethoven's occasional compositions; but an occasional composition is exactly what the finale of op. 130 proved to be.<sup>27</sup>

However, although the Op. 135 quartet does, as both Cooper and Chua observe, move towards a simpler, more direct aesthetic, nowhere does it come remotely near the clichéd

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<sup>27</sup> Cooper (1985) p. 414

gestures of the Allegro. This difference is significant. Kerman suggests that the incongruity between the replacement finale and the rest of the quartet may be explained simply in terms of the passage of time between the composition of Op. 130 and that of the replacement finale, a period that had included the composition of Op. 135. The replacement finale, however, is not in the same style as Op. 135, despite the 'superficial resemblance' between them. Thus Beethoven is not simply writing a replacement finale from a different aesthetic viewpoint in a "new" style that was arrived at since the composition of Op. 130 – if he were, there would not be such a difference between Op. 135 and the replacement Rondo. It appears then that the composition of the Allegro movement represents a definite stylistic choice, different from anything else composed at the time. This is problematic for the viewpoint expressed by Kerman and those who follow him: if Beethoven did indeed perceive the supposed problems with the Fugue from "beyond" its composition then would he, from this more dispassionate position not have composed something more fitting than the alternative finale seems to be? In short, why replace one problematic finale with another?

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The decision to acquiesce to a replacement finale for the Grosse Fuge, whether as a result of financial, personal or aesthetic considerations, is only half of the issue. The main debate centres upon the manner in which Beethoven chose to replace the Fugue: the radical change in tone in the Allegro provokes issues that have divided critics from the beginning. Some writers consider that the new finale is actually less problematic than the Fugue, and indeed that, since it is more in keeping with the overall feeling and course of the quartet, it is much better suited and a better ending to the quartet than the original finale. This argument may be seen as an attempt to reconcile this replacement movement with other movements of the B flat quartet. Cooper, for example, adopts this view, stating that the replacement finale's "smaller scale and optimistic character . . . suit the quartet as a whole. Like Op. 135, it seems at times to recall the eighteenth

century, leading back to normality after the extraordinary profundity of the Cavatina".<sup>28</sup>

Cooper, however, is in the minority: many more critics, regardless of their opinion of the Grosse Fuge, have considered the replacement movement to be problematic. Kerman, for example, states that, although he does not consider the original version of Op. 130 to be satisfactory, he finds the revised version equally unsatisfactory, especially when the whole quartet is compared to the other late quartets.<sup>29</sup> Kinderman considers that, because of the extremes of contrast and juxtaposition within the rest of the quartet, "the Grosse Fuge provides a much more compelling culmination than the substitute rondo finale",<sup>30</sup> whilst for Mahaim, as was seen, the Rondo is not an alternative to the Grosse Fuge but a foreign entity, a desecration of the original version of the quartet by a Beethoven who was broken and defeated.

Cooper acknowledges the incongruity of this movement with the rest of the Op. 130 quartet, attempting to explain this difficulty by relating the Allegro to the concept of finishing a serious work of art with a lighter finale, as happens frequently in Mozart. He considers that the replacement finale therefore indicates "an earlier, pre-romantic aesthetic",<sup>31</sup> an aesthetic that was, of course, precisely that of Beethoven's youth. He speculates that this movement, together with the Op. 135 quartet, may be taken as evidence that Beethoven was on the verge of another stylistic period – a reversion to an earlier aesthetic – perhaps occasioned by his troubled personal circumstances. In the event, this change never came to fruition because of the composer's death.

For Kerman the issue rests upon the character of the replacement Allegro. His argument is essentially that Beethoven, following the composition of Op. 131 and 135 had moved through the difficulties encountered in the Op. 130 quartet. As a result, the problems

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<sup>28</sup> Cooper (2000) p. 346

<sup>29</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 370

<sup>30</sup> Kinderman (1995) p. 306/7

<sup>31</sup> Cooper (1985) p. 389



addressed in that quartet were now distant and he could view the struggle within the earlier work more dispassionately. This new perspective, in addition to allowing him to see the inherent problems with the Grosse Fuge, also affected the character of the replacement: Beethoven was now above these issues, and the “sunny, gay, classicising, Haydnesque conclusion”<sup>32</sup> is his response to the problems from beyond them. The effect that this produces for the whole quartet, however, is unsatisfactory; it is simply out of place within the scope of the work.

The viewpoint proposed in the current work initially appears to support this latter view: the replacement finale is unsatisfactory when considered as either a conclusion to the Op. 130 quartet, or as a replacement for the Grosse Fuge. However charming, however subtle or powerful this finale appears to be, it remains incongruous both “internally”, in relation to the quartet in which it resides, and “externally” with the composers other works. Indeed, even those who consider it a more fitting conclusion to the Op. 130 quartet than the Fugue still feel compelled to explain the radical departure in tone that it represents.<sup>33</sup> Within the middle movements of the Op. 130 quartet there is a trend towards simplicity, particularly within the two dance movements, and even towards a more “Classical” aesthetic within the third movement. Nevertheless, all of the preceding movements contain significant complexities and innovations. Against this backdrop the exaggerated conventionality of the replacement finale appears decidedly incongruous – its anachronisms, clichés and conventionality sounding markedly naive compared to the striking contrasts, juxtapositions and innovations of the preceding five movements.

Therefore, I consider that the incongruity that exists between the replacement Allegro movement and its context can be explained only as a direct stylistic choice. Although some commentators consider the anachronisms of this movement to be, in essence, a Haydnesque tribute to the spirit of the Biedermeier, this movement moves far beyond this point. It is comprised largely of clichés, references to the past that are so thoroughly

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<sup>32</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 371

conventional as to border on the banal. The exaggeration and accumulation of these gestures objectifies their conventionality, and this objectification effectively leads to the satirising of this conventionality: the movement may be understood in terms of irony, as a satirical polemic against musical banality. Irony is an integral meaning or function of the replacement finale - in fact it may be that it is the whole reason for this movement's existence.

From this viewpoint it is therefore possible to consider that in replacing the Grosse Fuge with the Allegro, Beethoven replaces one ironic movement with another. Considering the replacement in terms of irony may therefore better allow the reconciliation of this movement to the context of the quartet into which it was inserted. As seen in the preceding chapter, I consider that irony forms an inherent part of the purport and the structure of the Op. 130 quartet as a whole and of the Fugue in particular. An "ironic" reading of the replacement Allegro movement would place it within the greater ironic context of the rest of this work: this finale would therefore function as only one of several ironies.

The ironies of the two finales to this quartet, however, are of different orders. As was considered in the previous chapter, the irony of the Grosse Fuge is essentially paradoxical, or 'general' irony: the perception of existence as ironic. This paradoxical irony of existence is expressed in its overpowering structure through the continuous juxtaposition of incongruous elements, a continual chain of paradox. The irony of the replacement finale, in contrast, is satirical, directed towards the viewpoint of those who considered the Fugue to be unintelligible, or unsuccessful.

Considering this movement in terms of irony may therefore also account for the circumstances in which the substitution of the finale came to be effected. The theory proposed here that Beethoven's decision to replace the Grosse Fuge was not fundamentally based upon aesthetic grounds. That is, the decision was not, as Kerman

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<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Kerman (1967) p. 370-374 and Cooper (1990) p. 214 ff

argues “an acknowledgement . . . that [Beethoven] saw something wrong with the way it sat in the quartet”<sup>34</sup>. Rather, this decision may have been taken entirely as a response to the external pressures cited above. Although it may have been that the actual decision was made because he felt that there was, due to these pressures, no alternative but to replace the Fugue, I would suggest that the replacement movement is a satirical response to the viewpoint of those who misunderstood or undervalued the *Grosse Fuge*.

Although the historical evidence given above is only circumstantial, the response to the first performance of the Op. 130 quartet, and the subsequent opinion of his publisher clearly produced a situation where Beethoven was misunderstood, rejected and even ridiculed. It is not inconceivable, given his propensity for irony, that he responded with irony, even sarcasm. (Indeed, to consider the replacement finale as an ironic response is consistent with the broader context of both the “inter-personal” irony that informed Beethoven’s manner, and the irony in his other quartets.) The implication of his outburst following the first performance is that the audience were too simple-minded to comprehend the Fugue – is it possible that his response was to insult those who insulted him by giving them a replacement finale that was so musically simple, even banal that it is essentially comprised largely by clichés? Such a response would indicate aesthetic shortcomings, not in the *Grosse Fuge*, but rather in those who failed to appreciate its value.

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### **The Replacement Finale: *Allegro***

Analysis of the exposition of this movement demonstrates the significant proportion of conventional, even clichéd gestures. The opening gesture of this movement - the accompaniment figure in the viola - is an example of the type of “clockwork” figure that

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<sup>34</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 370

Haydn utilises in the second movement of his "Clock" Symphony. The manner in which this gesture is presented - highlighted baldly on its own - foregrounds i.e. draws attention to its anachronism. The opening bars may therefore be considered to produce a certain anachronistic character, or a sense of a musical past tense.

In addition, this accompaniment figure produces a striking contrast with the Cavatina that would, in the revised version of the quartet, precede it. Cooper considers this juxtaposition to be "cynical": "the staccato notes of the viola break in on the tense emotional silence at the end of the Cavatina".<sup>35</sup> In effect, the viola "undercuts" the emotionalism of the Cavatina and, as has been considered above, the effect of such undercutting of a serious movement is almost invariably comic. This comic effect is heightened by the fact that the "clockwork" accompaniment has itself been identified with Haydnesque wit: "Most of the familiar nicknames for [Haydn's] works respond to features that listeners have taken as humorous . . . In other cases the wit is on a higher plane e.g. the "ticking" accompaniment in the slow movement of the 'Clock' Symphony".<sup>36</sup> Cooper also observes the comic effect, particularly of the harmonic structure, of these opening bars, as well as that of the pseudo cross-relation of the theme in bars 69/70.<sup>37</sup> Thus these opening bars may be considered to produce the effect not only of the comic, but particularly of a comic anachronism.

The theme that Beethoven introduces over this accompaniment continues to reference previous musical styles. Essentially this theme (bars 3 to 10) outlines an ascending dominant seventh arpeggio followed by a descent to the leading note, with simple rising appoggiatura figures following the repetition of this note. The consequent phrase effectively repeats the gesture, minus the appoggiaturas, and the entire phrase is repeated almost exactly between bars 11 and 17. This type of triadic allegro theme, with clearly

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<sup>35</sup> Cooper (1985) p. 390

<sup>36</sup> Webster, James (2001) "Haydn: Style, Aesthetics, Compositional Method" in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* ed. Stanley Sadie Vol. 11. p. 192

<sup>37</sup> Cooper (1985) p. 390

### Finale, Allegro



octaves in the outer parts around a pedal point in the inner parts. This figure is utterly banal - it is the most simple way imaginable of underlining the dominant harmony at the end of the exposition. Indeed Kerman goes so far as to describe this section as “extremely formal - even vacuous”.<sup>38</sup>

Ex. 6.2 Op. 130 6th Movement  
89 (Allegro)

Violin I  
Violin II  
Viola  
Violoncello

93

dim. p

The exaggerated simplicity of function within the formal sections of the exposition may also be seen within the second-key area. The imitative entries at bar 33 that effect the transition to the dominant are an obvious gesture. The first imitation, in bars 33 and 34 simply echoes the preceding bars, thereby effectively producing two perfect cadence gestures in as many bars. As a result they are somewhat redundant, or even banal: the gesture is simple enough without being repeated. The effect is heightened by the prominence of the repeat occurring within a solo line.

<sup>38</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 371

Ex. 6.3 Op. 130 6th Movement

32 (Allegro)

Even more exaggeratedly simple is the sequence that occurs between bars 51 and 56 following the cadence of the second subject.

Ex. 6.4 Op. 130 6th Movement

(Allegro)

Although these bars do not trace an exact sequence harmonically (the F in the bass in bar 54 actually breaks the sequence), nevertheless a conventional descending-thirds progression is clearly signified. The texture is, again, as simple as imaginable, with the imitation of the semiquaver figure between the instruments, which serves to underline the harmonic sequence, occurring over close-position chords. Finally, the semiquaver

figure occurs over thoroughly conventional cadential harmony, reaffirming F major.

The combination of these elements combines to produce an exaggeratedly simple effect, effectively stripping the music down to its barest formal functions. The fact that this sequence appears as an almost verbatim repeat underlines the banality of the gesture. When these banal functional passages are considered within the context of the simple, “Classical” thematic sections, then an even more strikingly conventionalised, banal effect is produced. Essentially, therefore, the exaggerated simplicity of this exposition arises from the cumulative effect of the combination of simple elements.

Sheinberg specifically identifies the accumulation of conventional gestures as a type of exaggeration, because no one instance of a type or style should contain all the elements common to that style. Therefore, this exaggerated accumulation of such conventions may be regarded as a technique of satire: “the accumulation of all the features that are considered as characteristic of any group, race, species or type on one sole individual would result in its caricature”.<sup>39</sup> Thus if each element within this movement were considered individually then it might be possible to reconcile them. However, the sheer number of conventional, over-simplified gestures, and in particular the repetition of these clichés throughout this section, makes such a reconciliation impossible – the effect is satirical.

This is compounded by the harmonic structure of the movement. Although, as will be seen, there are elements of the harmonic architecture that are novel, overall the harmonic movement sounds particularly simple. This effect is heightened by the comparison with both the preceding movements of the Op. 130 quartet and the other late quartets. As an example consider the harmonic structure of the first ten bars of the movement. There is an element of harmonic ambiguity within the theme in that it begins off-tonic, on the supertonic dominant. However, from this beginning it follows a simple circle of fifths

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<sup>39</sup> Sheinberg (2000) p. 120

progression - the most conventional of modulatory progressions - to arrive on the tonic in bar 10. The cadence in this bar is preceded (bars 8 and 9) by a thoroughly conventional bass line - B flat, G, E flat, F, B flat (I, VI, IV, V, I) - that sounds particularly simplistic as a result of the overall texture. The repetition of the entire process in bars 11 to 18, and the conventional "balancing" movement towards the subdominant over a tonic pedal in bar 25 onwards further underscores the tonic of the movement.

Even the moments of harmonic ambiguity that occur in the exposition of this movement may be seen to be related to conventional procedure. The cadence that is expected in bar 67, following the sequential and cadential gestures in bars 51 to 66 that were considered above, is undercut by the sudden harmonic diversion and reduction to solo cello. Such a harmonic procedure is conventional, effectively delaying the cadence so that, when it does occur in bar 89, following the harmonic ambiguity, the dominant is established all the more powerfully.

Indeed, throughout the course of the movement, the conventional harmonic/functional landmarks of sonata form are maintained. As Kerman observes, Beethoven begins the development section, following the insertion of the unusual A flat major episode (which will be considered below), in the entirely conventional key of the dominant. The conventionality of this moment is heightened by comparison with the unconventional A flat episode, as well as by the manner in which the modulation to F is achieved: "Beethoven stops at the first turn, F minor, and with a flip of the mode begins his development as conventionally as you please on the dominant, F major".<sup>40</sup> Kerman considers this harmonic procedure, as well as the movement towards the subdominant in the recapitulation to be a reference to Haydn: "Here the bow to Haydn seems even deeper . . . because Beethoven seems to be getting so much more pleasure out of these

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<sup>40</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 371

Haydnesque manipulations”.<sup>41</sup>

In addition, I would suggest that the whole harmonic process of the first-key area is actually reminiscent of Haydn: the off-tonic opening, the resulting harmonic ambiguity and the basic opposition of major and minor are Haydnesque gestures. All of these may be seen within the opening of his quartet Op. 33 no. 1. This movement begins, apparently unambiguously, in D major. However, the tonality moves towards B minor in bar 3, before being deflected by the interrupted cadence in bar 4. This vacillation between D major and B minor is continued throughout the next six bars, the silences in bars 5 and 9 and the repetition of the interrupted cadence disallowing any settling of the key. It is only at bar 10 that the tonic – B minor – is firmly established.

Ex. 6.5 Haydn Op. 33 no. 1 1st Movement

**Allegro moderato**

Violin I  
Violin II  
Viola  
Violoncello

Measures 1-10 of the first movement of Haydn's Quartet Op. 33 no. 1. The score is for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The tempo is marked 'Allegro moderato'. The score includes dynamic markings (p, cresc., f) and articulation marks (accents). The first system covers measures 1-6, and the second system covers measures 7-10. The music begins in D major and moves towards B minor by measure 3, with an interrupted cadence in measure 4. The tonality continues to vacillate between D major and B minor through measures 5-9, with silences in bars 5 and 9, and is finally established in B minor at measure 10.

Kerman is not alone in considering that this movement contains references to Haydn.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.



Steinberg, for example, refers to the opening harmonic transition from G minor to B flat as “a piquant, rather Haydnesque harmonic slant”.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Cooper relates this movement, together with the andante of the Op. 127 quartet to the Biedermeier aesthetic, referring to it as “a well-turned and comfortably upholstered Biedermeier chair into which the listener can sink”<sup>43</sup> and as a “tribute to the domestic, middle-class spirit of the Biedermeier age”.<sup>44</sup> Although this is not so closely related to Haydn, the clear implication of Cooper’s comments is that this movement appears to be, in large part, conventional and conservative.

Although Chua does no actual analysis of this replacement finale his comments are particularly important for the theory given here. Like Kerman, his starting point is the observation that the Allegro was written outside the time period of the Galitzin quartets, and the assumption that it, along with Op. 135, subscribes to a completely different compositional aesthetic. He considers that, although some have seen the style of the Op. 131 and 135 quartets and the Allegro as a re-integration of Beethoven’s style, after the dissociation and disintegration of his earlier works, such a return would, in fact be impossible. Rather, he considers that there is “an air of indifference, as if the progress of the “Galitzin” quartets had simply reached a point of stasis, and all that is left is the history of that progress to play with”.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, he considers that comparison of the Grosse Fuge and the Allegro highlights this: whereas the Fuge pushes towards destruction, “the new finale, in the face of that destruction, hides beneath a sheen of history or a style of Classicism as if nothing had happened”.<sup>46</sup> The result is that the new finale is “disconcerting”, because of its “nonchalant smile”.<sup>47</sup>

Chua’s comments highlight two of the issues most central to the current argument. The

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<sup>42</sup> Steinberg (1994) p. 244

<sup>43</sup> Cooper (1985) p. 390

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Chua (1995) p. 4

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

first of these is that the conventionality of this movement, whether this is referred to in terms of “Classicism”, as “Haydnesque” or even as a tribute to the Biedermeier, is fundamentally inauthentic – it is, in his terms, only a “sheen” or a “style” (by which he presumably means a stylisation). However, as has been demonstrated, the conventionality, or classicism of this movement is exaggerated, particularly in the case of functional passages and “architectural” tonal landmarks. This produced a “too-great” accumulation of simple, even banal gestures, caused in particular by the immediate repetition of each gesture.

Moreover, the exaggerated conventionality of this movement is incongruous with the context in which it occurs. This context encompasses the Op. 130 quartet, in which, as has been stated above, the replacement finale is incongruous in terms of style and harmonic language, as well as in the overall compositional trajectory of the quartet. However, it also includes the vast majority not only of the late quartets, but also of the late style in general. Even Op. 135, which belongs to a different compositional aesthetic than the other late quartets, is not as exaggeratedly simple as this movement.

The result of this is that, rather than a stylisation of Classicism, this movement becomes a satirical parody of this style. The exaggeration of conventional elements is incongruous with both the style and with the context of the rest of the work. Because of this exaggerated incongruity, this movement will be seen to be not a “tribute”, either to Haydn or, as Cooper suggests, to the Biedermeier aesthetic, but rather a satirical parody of musical conventionality and cliché. The aim of this parody is the objectification of musical simplicity and comprehensibility in order to satirise the viewpoint of those who misunderstood the Grosse Fuge.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p. 243

## The Fugue within the Allegro

The second important consideration highlighted by Chua concerns the relationship between the replacement Allegro finale and the Grosse Fuge:

It is unfortunate that this issue – “which finale?” – leads to an utterly futile debate in which one movement is inevitably marginalized in exalting the other. Either the Grosse Fuge belittles the ‘scherzo’ or the ‘scherzo’ mocks the grossness of the fugue, depending upon whether one prefers the sociability of the Classical aesthetic or the prophetic struggle of the nineteenth-century genius. Such a dispute devalues the fact that the scherzo is wrought in a highly sophisticated and ambiguous form and that the Grosse Fuge is carefully calculated as an integral part of the quartet and is not some detachable monstrosity that ended up as Op. 133.<sup>48</sup>

It is important to realise that in the case of the replacement finale of the Op. 130 quartet, unlike the other cases of replacement movements cited above, the new movement does not simply replace the original. As has been considered, the revisions of the Waldstein and the Ninth Symphony etc. were completed before the performance or publication of these works; the replacement movements therefore supplant the originals, effectively negating their existence as parts of the work. In the case of the Op. 130 quartet, however, the fact that the work had been performed and all but published in its original version means that the replacement of the Grosse Fuge did not simply supplant this movement but rather produced two radically different versions of the same quartet. There is therefore almost a duality within the very structure of this quartet.

The existence of two alternative versions of the same quartet is of utmost importance to the reading of the Allegro movement. The fact that the quartet originally appeared with a different ending means that the existence of the replacement finale does not negate that of the Grosse Fuge: rather this alternative exists in relationship with the original version. In other words, the Allegro movement can never exist as a movement in its own right, but will always be compared to the Fugue: it will function precisely as a replacement,

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. p. 269 n. 21

with the presence of the Grosse Fuge, as it were, in the background.

Chua concludes that this duality leaves the 'meaning' of the quartet "open" – neither version of the quartet can truly achieve a final closure due to the existence of an alternative purport. In other words, the dual courses of the work produce a structure of alternatives similar to those discussed in chapter six. I would suggest, however, that the duality of this quartet cannot really be adequately described simply as a passive "openness". The radically different character of the alternative finales has a tendency to establish an antithetical relationship between the two versions of the quartet, a relationship of contrariety, or even juxtaposition that has occurred from the moment the replacement was made.

Cooper highlights the opposition between the two alternative finales when he states that "as a replacement for the Cyclopean masonry of the Grosse Fuge the effect is as incongruous as that of a Baroque chapel attached to a Romanesque cathedral".<sup>49</sup> This incongruity is important for the reading of the Allegro that is proposed here: the Allegro exists not simply as a replacement for the Fugue, but rather as reaction to the whole situation surrounding the Fugue. It exists as an ironic, satirical comment upon the circumstances surrounding the replacement of the Fugue, the shadow of which looms over the Allegro as a constant, unheard presence.

Crucially this relationship between the Allegro and the Grosse Fuge is actually reflected within the structure of the Allegro. Daverio points out that the new finale contains "echoes" of the Fugue: as a result he considers that this movement represents "more than a concession to popular taste".<sup>50</sup> I would suggest, however, that this finale contains not simply "echoes" of the Fugue, but specific references to its thematic, harmonic and textural structure. For example, the opening gesture of the Allegro relates closely, if antithetically, to the opening of the Fugue. The powerful opening unison G's of the

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<sup>49</sup> Cooper (1985) p. 390

Fugue, which build upon the high seriousness of the Cavatina, are recalled in the Allegro, transformed into an anachronism that, as has been seen, undermines the seriousness of the preceding movement. In addition, the harmonic course of the opening theme of the Allegro follows the same circle of fifths as the opening Overtura of the Fugue.

Arguably the most significant references to the Fugue, however, occur within the development section of the Allegro. The development section begins with a quasi-rhetorical version of the theme in bars 97 to 100 before modulating to the unusual key of A flat major in bar 109, at which point an entirely new theme, markedly different in character from anything preceding it in the movement occurs.

Ex. 6.6 Beethoven Op. 130 6th Movement

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the 6th movement of Beethoven's Op. 130. The first system covers measures 97 to 104, and the second system covers measures 105 to 112. The score is written for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The first system begins with a tempo marking of '(Allegro)' and a dynamic of 'poco ritard.' (poco ritardando). The second system begins with a tempo marking of 'in tempo' and a dynamic of 'dim.' (diminuendo). The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, slurs, and dynamic markings.

As has been indicated, this movement is essentially a hybrid of sonata and rondo forms:

<sup>50</sup> Daverio (2000) p. 164



indeed it is the insertion of this A flat major episode that contributes most to this reading of the formal structure of this work. In such a scheme this section functions as a first episode and it is entirely appropriate, therefore, that there is an introduction of new material. However, this “episode” is far more than simply a contrasting formal section – it is a direct reference to the great A flat fugue of the original finale.

As was considered above, this A flat fugue is, together with the first B flat fugue, one of the twin pillars of the Grosse Fuge’s structure. It is surely no coincidence that Beethoven chooses this remote key for the episodic material of his replacement finale. Indeed the reference to the Fugue can scarcely be doubted when one considers that, within this section there is also a reference, indeed almost a quotation, of the main four-note theme of the Fugue (bars 132-140). Although Steinberg terms this moment simply a “casual reference”<sup>51</sup> I would suggest that it is actually, as Daverio considers, “a motivic relative of the four-note cell that runs through the Grosse Fuge”<sup>52</sup>. This viewpoint is strengthened by the fact that this thematic reference to the Fugue theme occurs in a prominent location, in terms of both the texture (i.e. imitated between the two violins in a high register), as well as formally – within one of the most important structural elements of the movement.

Ex. 6.7 Op. 130 6th Movement

132 (Allegro)

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

*cresc.* *dim.* *cresc.* *p*

*cresc.* *dim.* *cresc.* *p*

*cresc.* *dim.* *cresc.* *p*

*cresc.* *dim.* *cresc.* *p*

<sup>51</sup> Steinberg (1994) p. 244

<sup>52</sup> Daverio (2000) p. 164

In addition to these thematic and structural references the 16-bar unison passage at the end of the development section (bars 208 to 223) strongly recalls the gritty texture and chromatic movement of the Fugue. Indeed Kerman relates both this passage and the Scherzo of Op. 135 to the Grosse Fuge: "there is the same sense of unknown energy flaring without notice, of turbulence suffered and controlled - the same whiff of the Great Fugue".<sup>53</sup> This strange unison passage occurs following a section of very conventional development material and processes. Following the imitative entries of the theme in bars 162 to 168 the ascending figure from the third bar of the theme occurs as a sequential motive, accompanied by a semiquaver figure derived from the second bar of the theme (bars 170 to 172 – example 5.8). This fragment appears in inversion as a counterpoint to itself from bars 182 to 188 and then in diminution from bar 189 onwards. This manipulation or exploration of the motivic potential of the elements of the theme is highly conventional in approach: indeed compared to the developments of Beethoven's "Heroic" style it is almost banal. The conventionality is, again, highlighted by the harmonic course of this development, which is essentially limited to circle-of-fifths motion, albeit rapid in places. The result of this is that it is possible to consider the development section of this movement as an essentially conventional passage sandwiched between two significant references to the Grosse Fuge.

It is the combination of references to the Grosse Fuge that is significant. In addition to the harmonic references of the opening bars, the insertion of the A flat section means that two of the key harmonic elements of the Fugue are retained within the structure of the Allegro. These tonal references are further underscored by the thematic reference, or quotation within this episodic section. Thus not only are there passing resemblances to key structural moments of the Fugue within the Allegro, but there is also an evocation of the Fugue itself, represented by its theme. The unison passage at the end of the development section does not simply add another reference: rather it places these key references in contrast with very conventional developmental material. This

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<sup>53</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 372

juxtaposition of Fugue references with overtly conventional material results in a direct confrontation of the evocation of the Fugue with the musically conventional or banal, mirroring the antithetical relationship that exists between the two movements.

Ex. 6.8 Op. 130 6th Movement  
(Allegro)

Violin I  
*sempre pp*

Violin II  
*sempre pp*

Viola  
*sempre p*

Violoncello

*sempre p*

*sempre p*



The result of this is that the relationship that exists between the two movements, which arises as a result of the circumstances that generated the replacement finale, is reflected as an opposition *within* the structure of the new finale. As was stated above, the new finale does not simply replace the Grosse Fuge: rather, it exists as an alternative ending to an already-completed work. As such, there is always a comparison between the alternative versions i.e. the alternative finales of the quartet. This is particularly important in light of the interpretation of this movement proposed here. If this finale is understood as, in some sense, a satire of musical conventionality then it could be argued that it not only objectifies such conventionality but does so specifically in relation or in contrast to the Grosse Fuge, as an inter-textual comment. Within this movement the only areas of non-conventional discourse are those that refer specifically to the Fugue: those that relate simply to the Allegro material are exaggeratedly conventional. Whereas the exaggeration of the conventionality of the Allegro material produces an objectification of this material (for reasons that will be considered more fully below), the unconventionality of the passages that refer to the Fugue prevents their objectification. As a result, within the very structure of the finale, its own structure is seen to be subordinate and objectified/satirised, in direct comparison to the references to the Fugue. The implication of this reading is obvious: the assertion of the unconventionality of the Fugue over the musically conventional and banal

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Paradoxically, the duality that exists within the structure of the Allegro finale with the insertion of the references to the Grosse Fuge actually serves to make this replacement finale a more interesting and innovative movement than it otherwise might have been: for all its conventionality it is not simply a series of clichés, or a hackneyed re-hashing of Classical conventions. Rather, it actually possesses great charm and surprising sophistication – it is, after all, a movement by Beethoven! In particular the ambiguity of its formal structure is striking: this movement is really, as Imeson and Chua also consider, a kind of rondo with sonata elements and an extended coda. Within the pantheon of Classical genres hybrids such as sonata-rondo are, almost by definition, ambiguous in that most of the formal elements fulfil some kind of double-function.

It is, however, significant that it is the insertion of the references to the Grosse Fuge – particularly the A flat episode and the unison passage – that produces the ambiguities and formal innovations of this movement. In addition, it is the parallelism between the harmonic structures of the opening of the Fugue and the theme of the Allegro which produces the striking harmonic subtlety of the replacement finale. It is surely not coincidental that the innovative elements of this movement correspond to parallelisms with the Fugue: again, the innovative is juxtaposed with the conventional/banal.

The coda of this movement adds strength to the reading of this movement as a process of the objectification and satirisation of musical convention. Within this coda many of the clichéd elements of the Allegro material are exaggerated beyond the point of simple cliché until there is a rupturing of the “surface” of the discourse. This undermines the conventionality from within, producing incongruities within these very clichés and anachronisms that results in the objectification, not simply of their conventionality, but also of their artifice.

Perhaps the most significant instance of this occurs from bar 414 onwards. From this point there is the appearance of the beginning of a “second development”, a device that Beethoven had previously used in the codas or recapitulation of other movements (the



first movement of the Ninth Symphony, for example). This process begins with a stretto-like repeat of a fragment derived from the opening gesture of the theme, before this thematic motif is developed into an opposing ascending-descending, tonic-dominant motion from bar 418, and, from bar 422, further transformed into a diminished seventh arpeggio. This diminished seventh then functions first as an ascending 2-bar sequence between bars 422 and 428, before being reduced to a one-bar ascending motion.

Ex. 6.9 Op. 130 6th Movement

414 (Allegro)

Violin I *pp*

Violin II *pp*

Viola *pp*

Violoncello *pp*

*cresc. poco a poco*

422

*f* *più f*

*sf* *più f*

*f* *più f*

*f* *più f*

429

*ff*

*ff*

*ff*

*ff*



The motion across these twelve bars is important. There is a combination of a harmonic ascent through sequential motion, which actually accelerates in pace across bars 426 to 430, and an overall crescendo. The effect produced by this combination is of urgency, or of a forceful movement ascending, both harmonically and dynamically, at an increasing rate. Such a combination would not be particularly unusual for an ascending sequential motion. However, in this instance the fact that when the theme finally emerges as a complete statement it appears nearly an octave higher than when the sequence began indicates the exaggerated repetition involved in this passage – the sequence simply goes too far.

In addition to this exaggerated sequential motion there are several other exaggerated extremes within this passage. Firstly there is an extreme register used – the first violin uses about the highest tessitura of the entire movement. In addition, there is an extreme of compass across the ensemble, with upper and lower parts very far apart, an effect compounded by the extreme leaping motion in the cello throughout. The actual texture of the part-writing throughout the entire process is also somewhat unusual – it is essentially homophonic throughout the whole process, which, because of the speed of movement, produces a particularly dense effect. When the climactic statement of the theme finally occurs, however, the texture suddenly thins, with the inner parts effectively functioning as a pedal. This sudden change highlights the previously full texture even more. Finally, there is an extreme dynamic level used: following a long crescendo through the whole of the process of these bars, the climactic statement of the

theme culminates with a fortissimo dynamic level – one of the loudest moments of the movement.

The exaggeration of the elements of this sequential process is significant for the climactic statement of the theme that occurs in bar 430. When the theme does finally occur it halts the sequence abruptly, literally forcing itself into place, wrenching the diminished seventh motion into a dominant seventh only on the last beat of the bar. The result of this is that rather than an assertion of the theme, this moment sounds somewhat incongruous – the accumulated energy of the ascending sequence does not climax in the manner in which it might otherwise. This effect is compounded by a problematic harmonic basis for the climactic moment. In bars 25 to 32 there is corresponding appearance of the theme on B flat. Here the tonic pedal means that, although there is a V7 harmony (implying E flat) in the theme, there is no real move away from the tonic, and, as a result, it is more firmly established at the end of the consequent phrase (bar 32). Similarly, the moment of the re-establishment of the theme and of the tonic in the recapitulation also functions over a tonic pedal (bar 247 onwards). In the coda, however, the fact that the harmony under the B flat V7 arpeggio *moves* means that there is no establishment of the tonic. Instead, the E flat in bars 432/433, moving to B flat 7 in bar 433 sound like I – V. Although by the end of the consequent phrase the tonic is again established, it is not as emphatic as the earlier occurrence – it is the E flat in bar 435 that tends to sound like the tonic. The effect of this is that, although this climactic statement of the theme should, after such a monumental build-up, sound as an emphatic, even triumphant statement, it is critically undermined by the uncertainty of its actual key. (Note that this effect is achieved really through the fundamental instability inherent in the structure of the theme itself.)

Even more significant, in terms of the harmonic basis of these bars, is that, despite the huge momentum generated by the entire process of these bars, the sequence both begins and ends in B flat. The manner in which the tonality is wrenched back towards the tonic means that, in effect, this sequence, which is almost by definition a modulatory process,

actually fails to modulate. This is compounded by the fact that this accumulation of exaggerated extremes is actually incongruous with the rest of the movement – it moves beyond the established norms of the entire preceding movement, dynamically, harmonically, and in terms of register. The end result of this combination of too-great repetition, exaggerated extremes and unstable tonality is the undermining of the climactic statement: in effect it sounds “wrong”. Arriving after such an exaggerated accumulation this cannot help but fracture the “surface” of the discourse.

In other words this moment in the coda produces a striking incongruity. Much of this movement is constructed from an accumulation of exaggerated conventions and banal clichés. However, at this point the exaggeration goes so far and is so extreme that it breaks the very conventions that comprise it. This produces incongruity between this moment and both the rest of the movement and stylistic convention. This results in the “breaking of illusion”, thereby displaying the artifice of the moment, which forcefully objectifies the conventional and banal elements – they become the victims of satire.

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At this point it is perhaps necessary to consider the manner in which the use of convention in this movement may be understood to produce the process of objectification required for an ironic interpretation. As considered, the accumulation and exaggeration of these conventions essentially produces incongruity within the structure of the movement itself, within the context of the rest of the quartet and with the original context from which such musical conventions are drawn. This incongruity produces an objectification of these conventions – the type of aesthetic “distancing” discussed earlier in this work – resulting in them being placed in an inferior position. Consequently they become the victims of a mocking, satirising irony.

However, it is vital to consider that the objectification of these conventions produces, by extension, an objectification of a viewpoint expressed by, or in, these conventions. In

her discussion of the ethical basis of irony Sheinberg argues that there is a tendency to correlate the opposition of “normative” vs. “non-normative” with that of “culturally favoured” vs. “culturally dis-favoured”.<sup>54</sup> Stylistic “norms” are therefore, by extension, those which are “culturally favoured”. Significantly, she relates this latter opposition specifically to moral or ethical values, with the result that non-verbal forms of discourse such as music become capable of satirical comment upon ethical and moral concerns: where stylistic norms are satirised, then it is not only the normative style, but also the ethical norms represented by that style or topic, that becomes the victim of the irony. In effect the objectification of a stylistic norm, whether by exaggeration or another device, transforms that norm and any ethical or cultural value that is correlated to it, into “non-normative”, and hence into “culturally dis-favoured”.

This is effectively what occurs within this movement: throughout this work there is, as has been seen, an objectification of conventional “Haydnesque” gestures, banal modulatory processes and harmonic progressions, largely through the accumulation and exaggeration of these “norms”. In particular, within the coda these conventional norms are exaggerated to the point where the whole surface of the discourse – the artifice of these conventions – is fractured. The important point is that the conventions that comprise most of this movement are clearly anachronistic – they belong to an earlier musical age. Thus they may be understood to correlate not simply with the musical style of Classicism, but also with an ethical or moral norm that may be termed “conservatism”, that is, with classicism not as a previous style, but as a cultural prescription for the present.

I would suggest that the objectification of conventional norms within this movement transforms their purport into “non-normative” and “culturally dis-favoured” – they become the victims of satire. As a result the conservatism that is correlated with these norms itself becomes objectified as “culturally dis-favoured”: there is a reversal of ethical norms. Crucially, the conservatism identified within this movement – the

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<sup>54</sup> Sheinberg (2000) p. 25



exaggerated conventionality and banality – may be attributed, not simply to a general cultural viewpoint, but rather specifically to those who, like the “Biedermeier” audience at the first performance or the publisher Artaria, found the Fugue too extreme for their conservative tastes. The specific references to the Grosse Fuge lend weight to this reading of the replacement movement as a satirical polemic against the infamous “Cattle” and “Asses” that attracted Beethoven’s fury.

It is telling that the satirical technique employed by Beethoven in this movement shares many common elements with the almost archetypal satire seen in Jonathan Swift’s *Modest Proposal*, written in 1729. Although no relationship between the two pieces is suggested by the comparison, it is illuminating to consider similarities in approach. The first of these arises from the use of convention and exaggeration. Swift, like Beethoven, uses thoroughly conventional language and phraseology, as well as the conventions of publishing – such as the use of italics and capital letters – in order to produce a “veneer” of erudition and reasonableness. However, once the topic of the discourse is announced the accumulation and exaggeration of these conventions, resulting from the extended length and the fullness of the argument results in an extreme incongruity between the conventional tone and the subject matter.

In other words, since large sections of Swift’s *Proposal* are in thoroughly believable prose and demonstrate impeccable logic its effect is almost authentic, almost convincing. Indeed, if cannibalism were actually socially acceptable, then this piece could be taken as a piece of straightforward economics. However, the complete incongruity between the logical, conventional structure of the work and the context in which it occurs creates the satirical purport that this work engenders. Since cannibalism is socially unacceptable, the *Modest Proposal* is rendered satirical: the conventional “sociality” of the writer, together with intelligence and erudition of his proposal is opposed to, and is entirely incongruous with, the social unacceptability of the actual content of the proposal.

Significantly, Swift's use of convention is "aimed" in the same manner as Beethoven's. Swift's work addresses not simply the situation of the starvation and deprivation in Ireland, but also those represented by the conventionalised language used throughout the piece. In effect, he is directing his satire at those who sit idly by, discussing the problem and advancing solutions in spite of the suffering of the Irish, and the pressing need of action. In this way the conventions used within the process of the also become the target of the satire. Similarly, the musical conventions used within Beethoven's Allegro movement become the target of his satire: Beethoven uses exaggerated conventionality to represent musical conservatism and banality, objectifying these conventions within the discourse to satirical effect.

Crucially in Swift's polemical satire the reader only becomes aware of the satirical purport gradually: after an initially convincing, conventional opening the piece is viewed increasingly as ironic as the incongruities and exaggerated conventionalities mount. This is almost exactly the same course as that pursued by Beethoven in the replacement finale: much of the discourse appears to be authentic, and indeed there are elements that belong to the composer's later works. Nevertheless, such occasions actually function as an element of the satire: they constitute the "surface" of the discourse, a "foil" without which the satire cannot occur. For example, the appearance of the Fugue references in the "correct" key within the recapitulation (bars 361–387) helps to produce the structural integrity of the whole, as well as confirming the sonata-rondo interpretation. As the movement progresses the accumulation of exaggerated conventionality and banality, together with both the internal incongruities and the incongruity with its musical and biographical context, means that the satirical purport of the movement becomes increasingly apparent.

Significantly, in both works, the "surface" of the discourse is disturbed towards the end. As has been seen, the coda of the Allegro exaggerates the conventions of the movement to the point of incongruity, resulting in a "rupturing" of the discourse that results in the effect of "wrongness", thereby objectifying the conventions – the artifice – of the

movement. In a similar manner, at the end of the Modest Proposal the artifice of the proposal is juxtaposed with a statement of the condition of the poor in Swift's Ireland, thereby moving beyond the prevailing conventional devices of the satire, in favour of a simple statement of the problem:

I desire those politicians who dislike my overture, and may perhaps be so bold as to attempt an answer, that they will first ask the parents of these mortals, whether they would not at this day think it a great happiness to have been sold for food, at a year old in the manner I prescribe, and thereby have avoided such a perpetual scene of misfortunes as they have since gone through by the oppression of landlords, the impossibility of paying rent without money or trade, the want of common sustenance, with neither house nor clothes to cover them from the inclemencies of the weather, and the most inevitable prospect of entailing the like or greater miseries upon their breed for ever.

Beethoven's satirical attack within the replacement finale of the Op. 130 quartet is arguably more subtle than Swift's: there is less absurdity and none of the grotesquery present in Swift's polemic. Nevertheless, if the object of Beethoven's satire at first appears to be less clear this is only because it happens to comprise the very musical material of which the movement is constructed – the banal, clichéd gestures of an anachronistic musical conservatism. The interpretation of this movement as irony upholds Kinderman's assertion that "Beethoven's composition of the substitute rondo finale cannot be equated with a renunciation of the quartet in its original 'Galitzin' version, with the Grosse Fuge as finale".<sup>55</sup> From this viewpoint the finale may be seen to be, not a replacement or substitute, but an eloquent defence of the Fugue. Rather than a capitulation to popular taste or an acknowledgment of failure, it is a satirical parody no less powerful than Swift's, a bitter ironic comment upon the musical conservatism and aesthetic shortcomings of the Fugue's detractors.

This understanding therefore suggests a new motivation for the replacement of the Fugue. Moreover it demonstrates that the irony within these quartets is not only Romantic, it also encompasses the "rhetorical species of irony which, sparingly used,

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<sup>55</sup> Kinderman (1995) p. 303

has an excellent effect, especially in polemics”<sup>56</sup> that Schlegel identified as the complement to his “philosophical” irony. Beethoven was, in other words, not only a Romantic ironist; he was also a satirist of the highest order.

Since these phenomena are complex, and the relation about them is often avoided. The result is that they are often critical, indeed they are somewhat considered one and the same thing. This chapter will consider the relationship between these two phenomena, arguing that, although there is a relationship between ambiguity and irony, nevertheless the distinction between them is vital. Therefore, throughout this chapter I will attempt to demonstrate the manner in which they may be distinguished, using examples from Beethoven's quartets Op. 34 Number 3 and Op. 130. This differentiation is particularly important when considering musical discourse, not least because ambiguity plays a vital role within the processes of irony. More specifically, the nature of ambiguity in John Beethoven's quartets, particularly the late quartets, are significant, contributing their own meaning as irony obscures this significance and risks avoiding the point of these works.

One of the most significant studies of ambiguity is Emerson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. He defines ambiguity that: “The fundamental question, whether a sentence is to be called ambiguous or not, is that a word or a grammatical structure is effective in several ways at once.”<sup>57</sup> He goes on to expand this definition, explaining that:

A word may have several meanings, several meanings suggested with one another, several meanings which are of one another – ambiguity has been called several meanings which imply together that the word means one thing or more things. This is a scale which might be followed indefinitely. ‘Ambiguity’ might also mean the confusion as to what you read, or regarded as what might things, a probability that the meaning or both of two things has been meant, and the fact that a sentence has several meanings.<sup>58</sup>

From this starting point Emerson proceeds to divide the spectrum of ambiguous sentences into at least three levels in the extent to which these sentences are

<sup>56</sup> Schlegel (1991) Critical (Lyceum) fragment 42 p. 5

<sup>57</sup> Emerson (1970) p. 3

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. p. 36

## Ambiguity vs. Irony

It appears to be nearly impossible to discuss the nature and effect of irony without mentioning ambiguity. As will be seen, the problems of the relationship between these two phenomena are complex, and discussion about them is often avoided. The result is that they are often elided; indeed they are sometimes considered one and the same thing. This chapter will consider the relationship between these two phenomena, arguing that, although there is a relationship between ambiguity and irony, nevertheless the distinction between them is vital. Therefore, throughout this chapter I will attempt to demonstrate the manner in which they may be distinguished, using examples from Beethoven's quartets Op. 59 number 3 and Op. 130. This differentiation is particularly important when considering musical discourse, not least because ambiguity plays a vital role within the processes of tonality. More specifically, the instances of ambiguity within Beethoven's quartets, particularly the late quartets, are significant; considering these occurrences as irony obscures this significance and risks missing the point of these works.

One of the most significant studies of ambiguity is Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. He defines ambiguity thus: "The fundamental situation, whether it deserves to be called ambiguous or not, is that a word or a grammatical structure is effective in several ways at once".<sup>1</sup> He goes on to expand this definition, considering that

A word may have several distinct meanings; several meanings connected with one another; several meanings which need one another to complete their meaning; or several meanings which unite together so that the word means one relation or one process. This is a scale which might be followed continuously. 'Ambiguity' itself can mean an indecision as to what you mean, an intention to mean several things, a probability that one or other or both of two things has been meant, and the fact that a statement has several meanings.<sup>2</sup>

From this starting point Empson proceeds to divide the spectrum of ambiguous utterances more or less according to the extent to which these simultaneous

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<sup>1</sup> Empson (1956) p. 2

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 5/6



meanings are contradictory. In many of his examples, particularly of the earlier types of ambiguity, the result is that there are simply two ways in which the text may be read. Thus, according to him, in the following example the Lady is either humble, in contrast to “the proud”, or is actually proud herself.

How loved, how honoured once, avails thee not,  
To whom related, or by whom begot;  
A heap of dust is all remains of thee;  
'Tis all thou art, and all the proud shall be.

(Pope, *Unfortunate Lady*)

The last line of George Herbert's *The Sacrifice* is similar:

But now I die; Now, all is finished.  
My woe, man's weal; and now I bow my head:  
Only let others say, when I am dead,  
Never was grief like mine.

In this case there are two ambiguities. The first of these is with regard to the word “mine”: the grief belongs either to Christ himself, or to the “others”. In addition, the word “others” possesses ambiguity of this sort – it may be that the “others” are those who crucify, or some future “others”, regardless of which way the first ambiguity is read.

A basic structure of ambiguity may be derived from Empson's definition: in cases of ambiguous words or structures such as those above, there are two or more possible meanings, i.e. semantic structures, present simultaneously, producing alternative readings for the same text. In some cases, these semantic levels form opposing terms that are culturally defined as contradictory: for example the opposition, regarding the character of the Lady in Pope's poem, of humble and proud. These examples must therefore, according to Empson's definition, be considered ambiguous, since they are “effective in several ways at once”.

The problem with Empson's definition of ambiguity, and the structure of ambiguity that may be inferred from it, is that it may also be taken as a definition of irony: irony, as was seen previous chapters is also a structure of simultaneous “meanings”, which are often oppositional in nature. Like ambiguity (or at least like Empson's

definition of ambiguity), ironic structures may possess "several distinct meanings", that may, or may not be "connected". And in irony it is certainly the case that several meanings "unite together so that the word means one relation or one process".

This problem – the differentiation of ambiguity from irony – is often reflected in the work of those that discuss irony. Although there is frequently some acknowledgment of a differentiation between the phenomena, in practice the boundaries between them are not considered, and the two terms are often used synonymously. For example, Muecke denigrates the manner in which later concepts of irony appear to be indistinguishable from ambiguity:

Recently . . . there has been a tendency to equate subtlety in irony with a lesser degree or even an absence of contrast, so that any ambiguity may be regarded as ironical. And since practically all literature says more than it seems to be saying, if only because it contains the universal in the particular, practically all literature can be called ironical.<sup>3</sup>

Earlier in his discussion, however, he identified an ironic structure as an ambiguity:

Thirlwall cites the *Antigone* of Sophocles as ironical in that it impartially presents two equal and opposite points of view. The germ for this concept of irony is already in Friedrich Schlegel's 'Irony is a form of paradox' but Thirlwall even if he had read this in Schlegel is much more explicit. The later history of the concept of irony elevates this kind of irony to a central position: in any paradox there are two contrasting truths; *an ambiguity is ironical if the two co-existent meanings are opposed*.<sup>4</sup>

The matter is complicated still further when Muecke later considers that ambiguity, together with exaggeration, innuendo and "other stylistic warning signals",<sup>5</sup> may be read as an indicator of irony; indeed in his earlier work he explicitly considers ambiguity to be a technique of "impersonal irony".<sup>6</sup> The implication of this is that, if ambiguity is an element, indicator or technique of irony, then irony and ambiguity are, in essence, one and the same thing.

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<sup>3</sup> Muecke (1970) p. 32

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 22, emphasis added

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 55

<sup>6</sup> Muecke (1969) p. 70/71

Similar problems may also be seen in Booth's work. He, like Muecke, refers to ambiguity and irony separately, as distinct phenomena, and yet he likewise appears at times to consider ambiguity as either an effect or form of irony. For example, in discussing the manner in which multiple interpretations of a work are possible, Booth describes this type of ambiguity – the duality of meaning of a text – as “the irony that disorients by resisting univocal interpretation, the irony that evades committed speech”.<sup>7</sup> He considers this as “only a branch of a great and ancient art; even those modern works which are highly celebrated for their rich ambiguity reveal, on close inspection, large tracts of stable irony”.<sup>8</sup> His discussion of Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable* is similar: Booth describes the contradictory, internally incongruent views expressed in Beckett's work first as ambiguities, then subsequently as irony.

Philosophers and scientists and literary critics differ greatly about the value of clear literal statement, and about the availability of an unequivocal hold on any aspect of the truth. I think that none of the major philosophers has gone as far in repudiating them as Beckett asks us to go in *The Unnamable* . . . his position, if it can be called that, seems to me (and apparently to him) self-defeating, illogical, and untenable. But to say this is not to say that because we cannot reconstruct his ultimate ambiguities, or because they contradict the assumptions of my book, Beckett should not write them . . . There can be no guidebook to tell us how much irony a work *should* contain; the artist himself will show us how much of it a work *can* contain and still succeed with us.<sup>9</sup>

More recently, Sheinberg, who views irony in terms of its semantic structure, considers that both irony and ambiguity display this same structure:

A musical structure that encompasses coexisting incongruities can be regarded, by definition, as correlative to the cultural unit of ambiguity: for example, Maria's lullaby from the first act of *Wozzeck*, which combines incongruous musical elements of lullaby and military march. It is therefore not only an expression of musical irony, but also a *musical correlative of ambiguity as a cultural unit*. . . Ambiguity has several semantic embodiments in semantic structures, most notably irony. In many senses the cultural unit 'irony' is a correlative of the cultural unit 'ambiguity'; their structures are therefore correlative, too, and not just analogous to each other. This is a statement of major importance to this study, because it means that there can be musical structures that will *correlate* (rather than be analogous) with irony, parody, satire and the grotesque – all of these being particular cases of the cultural unit of ambiguity.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 48

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Booth (1974) p. 276

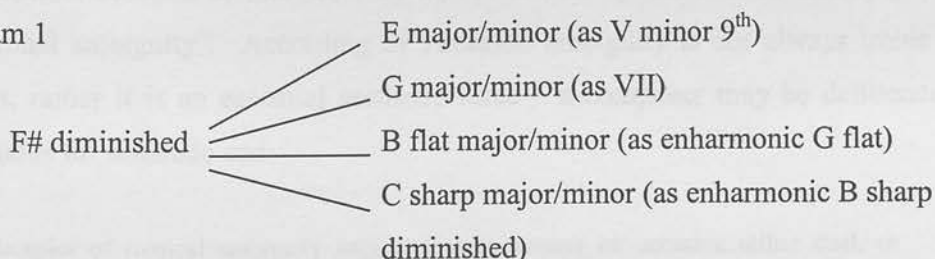
<sup>10</sup> Sheinberg (2000). p. 16/17, emphasis original

Indeed, she goes beyond this, considering that ambiguity is a type of meta-structure, of which irony and its sub-species are specific manifestations or modes.

Irony, parody, satire and the grotesque all use two or more layers of meaning, and therefore they can be regarded as manifestations of semantic ambiguity. Irony in its broadest sense, both as a tool for satirical purport and as an expression of the unresolvable, could be regarded as *a structural prototype for all other modes of ambiguity*.<sup>11</sup>

The problem of considering ambiguity and irony to be the same thing, to conceive of them as correlatives, or even simply to use one as a synonym for the other is that, in doing so leads to the logical conclusion that every instance of ambiguity must be considered to be ironic. The implications of such a view in relation to musical discourse are significant. According to this viewpoint, the diminished seventh chord that begins Beethoven's quartet Op. 59 no. 3 (example 1) must be considered to be an ironic gesture: since this chord could resolve in several different ways it must be considered to present several different meanings simultaneously, depending on the manner in which it's tonal function is interpreted. The following diagram demonstrates four of the potential "meanings" – i.e. possible outcomes - of the chord:

Diagram 1



Taking this further, it will be seen that, within the cultural context in which this work appears, every diminished chord must be considered ironic, since every one is "effective in several ways at once". Moreover, this is true of every musical occurrence whose tonal function is uncertain, or could resolve in more than one way. Thus even a dominant seventh at a cadence is included, because of the possibility

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 27 emphasis added

that the cadence may turn out to be, amongst other “meanings”, either perfect or interrupted.

From this viewpoint the examples that Empson gives must also be considered ironic, and in terms of language in general there is an even more profound significance. As will be considered more fully below, virtually every word can have, according to context, more than one meaning; every word therefore possesses an inherent type of ambiguity. According to the arguments given above, however, this latent ambiguity – known as lexical ambiguity – would have to be interpreted as constituting irony, and thus all language becomes an ironic utterance.<sup>12</sup>

Clearly, understanding ambiguity and irony as the same phenomenon is an untenable position, leading eventually to almost absurd, though logical conclusions. More importantly, from this viewpoint the value of both ambiguity and irony is enormously diminished, for if every utterance can be considered, at some level, ironic, then irony becomes of very little value. Differentiating between irony and ambiguity may therefore prove to be important for both phenomena.

One possible solution to this problem was presented by Thomson’s conception of “functional ambiguity”. According to Thomson ambiguity is not always ironic in purport, rather it is an essential aesthetic force – a composer may be deliberately ambiguous for aesthetic end:

Samples of musical ambiguity suggest that composers on occasion utilise dual, or multiple, or even vague meaning as integral parts of their image making. There are passages within some works when such attributes as directness, stability, assurance, clarity, unity or predictability would be inappropriate. At these locations the composer achieves structural success with an event that projects just the opposite qualities: obliquity, instability, evasiveness, diversity, equivocation, or even sheer disorder, if that be the most appropriate condition for the moment.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> It might be argued that considering every word ambiguous is little better than considering every word ironic. The problems of lexical ambiguity, however, are at least problems familiar to linguists and semioticians: better the devil you know!

<sup>13</sup> Thomson (1983) p. 10



Such intentional ambiguity is termed “functional ambiguity”: “When a music event, whether small or large, projects equivocation, implying no clear syntactic meaning or two or more potential meanings, I call this an instance of *functional ambiguity*”.<sup>14</sup>

Thomson’s work has been heavily criticised in a recent article by Kofi Agawu. He argues that ambiguity cannot really happen in music: “once the enabling constructs of music theory are brought into play, equivocation disappears”.<sup>15</sup> He considers that the application of context via musical theory removes the ambiguity in an irreversible “ambiguity-clarity order”. Moreover, apparent ambiguities may be disambiguated by specifying “context, listener baggage and segmental level”<sup>16</sup> and by differentiating between the diverse meanings according to a hierarchy based in either structural or stylistic factors. Effectively ambiguities are changed into a decidable hierarchy of probabilities.

In addition, Agawu discusses two different types of ambiguity. “Weak” ambiguities are the type of implicative, expectation-based ambiguity that will be considered below. “Stronger” ambiguities are produced both prospectively (i.e. as implications) and retrospectively, and thus are the final state of the music, a true state of final equivocation. Agawu, however, discounts the former type altogether and argues that for the reasons outlined “strong” ambiguities do not occur in “concrete musical situations” either.

Whilst some of Agawu’s argument is persuasive there are several problematic areas. The first is his definition of ambiguity: “a musical situation is ambiguous if it gives rise to two or more meanings”.<sup>17</sup> This definition is effectively the same as Empson’s, and therefore demonstrates the same kind of problem. Secondly, the fact that Agawu limits himself only to tonal ambiguity is problematic. There can be cases of formal ambiguity, for example, where the function of a section is ambiguous

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 3

<sup>15</sup> Agawu, Kofi (1994) “Ambiguity in Tonal Music: a Preliminary Study” in *Theory, Analysis and Meaning in Music* ed. Anthony Pople p.88

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 94

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 89

in the “strong” sense: the easiest example is the first movement of Beethoven’s Piano Sonata Op. 31 no. 2, where the prominent ascending arpeggio can be understood as both theme and, in retrospect, as a transition. Moreover, there are often also ambiguities regarding the semiotic significance of musical events: different readings of the same musical events can, according to Agawu’s own definition, be regarded as ambiguous.

Finally, whilst it is true that most tonal ambiguities can be disambiguated, and that virtually all resolve the irreversible manner described, nevertheless Agawu’s reduction of possibilities to probabilities does not actually remove the ambiguity: there is always the possibility that the most theoretically probable outcome may be circumvented. Moreover, ambiguity does not have to exist as the final state of the music to have existed within the process of the music. Just because the equivocal exists only for a certain period of time does not negate the objective fact of its appearance within the work. This is important in that, as Thomson states, a composer may use such moments of ambiguity for an aesthetic end.

Beethoven indeed uses the equivocal in just this manner. As will be seen, in the third movement of Op. 130 he actually uses “weak” ambiguities to profound effect. Each individual ambiguity within the movement resolves according to the process outlined by Agawu. The recurrence of instances of ambiguity throughout the movement, however, establishes ambiguity as an important element of the music’s structure and meaning, opposing the apparent “clarity” or “certainty” of Classicism.

Despite Agawu’s criticism, Thomson’s theory of functional ambiguity as an aesthetic end is convincing. However, his analyses, which focus on demonstrating congruence or incongruence between semantic levels, are less so. He considers only congeneric signification based upon both “simple sound articulation” (loudness, duration, pitch and timbre) and “gross form” (i.e. larger scale properties such as melody, texture, and harmony):

If within the total event at least two properties are noncongruent then structural ambiguity is a latent potential. If pairs of noncongruent properties coincide, either simultaneously or serially, ambiguity becomes a result of high probability for the perceptive listener.<sup>18</sup>

In effect he proposes a semantic structure of ambiguity identical to those considered earlier: parallel, contradictory semantic levels. Thus since Thomson's structure of "functional" ambiguity is the same as that of irony, it is impossible, in practice, to determine the distinction between them. As Sheinberg demonstrates, since irony and ambiguity appear to have the same semantic structure, ambiguity will always correlate with irony.

However, I consider that this problem arises, in part, through viewing irony purely as a structure. If, as in previous chapters, irony may be understood as a process of objectification, then it becomes possible to present ambiguities that are not ironic, i.e. "functional" ambiguities. For if irony is no longer based solely upon the incongruous structure but upon the objectification of that structure, then where there is no objectification, as is the case with ambiguity, then there is no irony.

Considering the difference between ambiguity and irony in terms of objectification, however, simply re-frames rather than solves the problem: the problem comes to centre on why one structure produces objectification, whilst another, seemingly identical structure does not. Therefore, over the course of this chapter, the differentiation of ambiguity from irony will be approached in two complementary ways. Firstly, although irony and ambiguity appear to possess the same structure – simultaneous, incongruous semantic levels – I will consider that objectification only occurs in ironic structures because ironic structures only occur on the "manifest" level of the discourse. Ambiguous structures, in contrast, always function on the "immanent" level, where, as will be seen, objectification cannot occur. Secondly, the result of considering the difference between irony and ambiguity in terms of immanence and manifestation will be that ambiguity will actually be shown to possess a different semantic structure from irony. Therefore, since ambiguity

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<sup>18</sup> Thomson (1983) p. 15

possesses a different structure and occurs on a different level of the discourse, the effect of ambiguity will be seen to be different from irony.

This approach to ambiguity is essentially semiotic and structuralist in nature. The reason for this approach is twofold. Firstly, ambiguity and irony both deal with the “meaning” or “meanings” of a given discourse; as such this suggests that a semiotic or semantic approach may be appropriate. Secondly, as may be seen from the above discussion there is a kind of latent structuralism involved in the conception of these phenomena (particularly in the cases of Booth and Sheinberg); my approach simply makes this explicit. In particular, I have chosen to use key terms from the work of the structuralist semiotician A. J. Greimas, specifically the concepts of “immanence” and “manifestation”. Again, the fact that several different theorists have chosen to apply his work to music suggests a certain pertinence or transferability of some aspects of his work to music.<sup>19</sup>

### **Immanence vs. Manifestation**

As stated, it is possible to make a fruitful distinction between ambiguity and irony on the basis of the opposition of the conceptions of “immanence” and “manifestation”. Greimas’ understanding of immanence, which derives, via Hjeltmslev, from Saussure, designates a semiotic system prior to its manifestation in discourse. He considers that “manifestation logically presupposes the manifested, that is to say the immanent semiotic form”;<sup>20</sup> in other words, immanence is logically anterior to manifestation. (In Eco’s terms, a cultural unit must logically exist as an identifiable entity, prior to its occurrence in a discourse.) Immanence then may be understood as the latent semantic structure of a word, prior to its occurrence in a given discourse.

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Grabóczy, Márta (1996) *Morphologie des Œuvres pour Piano des Liszt*, Tarasti, Eero (1978) *Myth and Music* and *A Theory of Musical Semiotics* (1994), and Monelle, Raymond (1991) ‘Structural Semantics and Instrumental Music’ in *Music Analysis*, 10/1-2.

<sup>20</sup> Greimas, A.J and Courtes, J. (1979) *Semiotique, Dictionnaire raisonné de la Théorie du Langage* p. 151

The function of this immanent semiotic level may best be seen in terms of Greimas' understanding of the "lexeme".<sup>21</sup> The term "lexeme" relates to individual words, indicating a semantic structure comprising all of the possible meanings that they may possess when they occur in discourse. It is essentially a configuration of the potential semantic contents of an individual word, all the meanings associated with it prior to its occurrence within a specific discourse. Thus the lexeme, as such, never occurs as a discursive unit, manifest in the discourse, since it is never possible that all the potential meanings of a word will actually occur simultaneously. Rather, it is a sort of 'virtual' unit, a lexicon of potential meanings of an individual word.

When this word occurs in discourse, however, some of these meanings are confirmed, whilst others are rejected within the specific context in which the word occurs, producing the meaning of the given utterance. The confirmation of one meaning occurs through the process of "redundancy", another key semiotic term, which refers simply to the iteration or repetition of semantic units. A simple example of the function both of redundancy and of the lexeme may be seen in Greimas' analysis of the sentence "the dog barks" ["le chien aboie"].<sup>22</sup> He considers that the words "dog" and "barks" both contain the semantic element "animal" as one of the elements of their respective lexemes.<sup>23</sup> The combination of these words within the sentence therefore produces repetition or iteration of this unit – this repetition makes the element redundant. In a characteristically Greimasian reversal of meaning, however, such redundancy makes such units *more* significant, rather than less significant (as might be supposed from the normal meaning of the term).<sup>24</sup> Thus "animal" is an essential part of the meaning of the sentence.

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, the definition of "lexeme" in Greimas, A.J and Courtes, J. (1979), as well as his use of the term throughout his *Sémantique Structurale* (1966), for example p. 56ff and 81

<sup>22</sup> This analysis may be found in Greimas (1966), p. 56 ff and 81

<sup>23</sup> Actually Greimas observes that the semantic unit "human" is also iterated in both words (since "dog" can be a derogatory term for a human). There is thus an interesting ambiguity to this sentence – it could refer either to an animal or a human – which only a greater context will clarify. Nevertheless, Greimas actually ignores this ambiguity entirely, a procedure I am following simply for the purpose of the example.

<sup>24</sup> It is, however, worth observing that too much redundancy will produce the effect of utter banality. This is, in a different way, a type of "meaninglessness", created by too-great repetition of a unit. The concept of redundancy thus seems particularly appropriate to music, where there is a constant balance between the necessary repetition of a gesture or theme to clarify its "meaning" or function and the over-repetition that leads to banality.



A similar process may be seen in music. Raymond Monelle, for example, applies Greimas' concepts to the analysis of the opening bars of the B flat minor fugue from the first book of Bach's *Das Wohltemperirte Clavier*<sup>25</sup>



In these first two bars there is the redundancy of musico-semantic units such as “minor”, “descending”, “duple time” through their reiteration between the notes of the theme. Again, it is the repetition of these semantic units that makes their presence clear to the listener: their redundancy increases the signification.<sup>26</sup>

Returning to the distinction of immanence and manifestation, it is possible to see that in the first example given there are two structures operative. The first is the semantic structure of the words of the sentence anterior to discourse (the lexemes), consisting of all the meanings associated with each of the words, all the potential meanings that each of them *may take* when manifested in a discourse. This potential, latent structure is what is indicated by the term “immanence”. In contrast to this, the semantic structure of each of the words when they occur in the short sentence or discourse above will be composed of iterated or redundant meanings. Instead of many alternative potential meanings, each word will produce essentially one actual meaning (in this case the semantic element “animal”); this type of semantic structure is termed “manifested”.

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<sup>25</sup> Monelle (1991)

<sup>26</sup> The significance of units such as “minor” and “duple time” is most important at the beginning of a piece, where there is an inherent initial uncertainty regarding metre and tonality. The significance of these semantic units naturally diminishes as the piece progresses – these “meanings” occur so frequently that they become over-redundant. Nevertheless, new occurrences such as hemiola bars or major-key transformations, for example, would foreground these original significations again though. Thus the redundancy of these significations establishes them as some of the most fundamental, “deep” elements of the structure.

There are two important considerations with regard to Greimas' definition of immanence that must be borne in mind throughout this discussion. The first of these is, as Greimas is at pains to point out, that discursive manifestation and the semiotic process are *not* one and the same thing; rather, they are two different processes. According to him, "manifestation, conceived as making the form present in the substance, presupposes semiosis (or the semiotic act) as an *a priori* condition. It brings together both the expression and content forms even in advance, as it were, of their material realisation (purport)".<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, according to Greimas, the immanent structure of a word is conceived of as an already-completed semiosis, i.e. a Saussurean union of signifier and signified, existing prior to discursive manifestation. In other words, the syntactic formant of the word and its potential semantic meanings have already been bound together by cultural convention (i.e. "cat" means, among other things, "small mammal"). Manifestation is therefore understood as one realisation of this complete *a priori* semiosis within the context of a specific discourse. As a simple example, the perfect cadence at the end of the first movement of quartet Op. 59 no 1 may be considered to be a specific manifestation of the cultural unit "perfect cadence".<sup>28</sup> This cultural unit is already a complete semiosis, which exists as a meta-type for all perfect cadences – i.e. as an immanent structure.

Although it seems somewhat obvious, Greimas second point is particularly important, and must be considered carefully: immanence and manifestation are not mutually exclusive but are part of the same process. This interdependence may be seen both within specific discourses, and the more general context of signifying systems as a whole. Firstly, within any specific discourse the immanent structure arises as a result of the manifest structure. For example, in order for the immanent structure of the potential meanings of a dominant seventh at a cadence point to occur requires that the chord itself actually appears, manifested in the discourse. However,

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<sup>27</sup> Monelle (1991) p. 183

<sup>28</sup> Which itself will form further correlations, with units such as "closure" for example.

it is equally the case that the manifest element that creates such immanent structures (the chord itself) is itself a specific realisation of a previous immanent structure.

Such interdependence within this specific instance is a microcosm of the large-scale interdependence that exists in every signifying system. This introduces what appears to be an impasse. Simply put, immanence and manifestation are interdependent in that, in order for any immanent structure to occur in any semiotic system at all, requires that a previous manifestation must have occurred – semiosis cannot take place without discursive manifestation. However, it is equally the case that manifestation i.e. discursive *communication* requires an immanent structure – manifestation cannot occur if there is no common “semantic universe”. It would appear then that since immanence and manifestation are, in reality, two sides of the same coin, it will not be possible to use their opposition as a method of distinguishing between ambiguity and irony: if immanent and manifest levels are interdependent, how can they be used to effectively differentiate ambiguity from irony?

However, the issue of “Which came first, the immanent or the manifest?” – a rewriting of the “chicken vs. egg” impasse – is important only in considering either the “first instance” of a cultural unit (i.e. the first time that a Saussurean union of signifier and signified is used to communicate, by cultural agreement) or the “first instance” of my learning the signification of the unit.<sup>29</sup> In both of these cases the distinction between immanence and manifestation ceases to exist, since they both require manifestation to produce immanence, and immanence to produce manifestation.

Beyond these instances, though, the question is entirely irrelevant. Once a unit has been used to signify, it passes on an individual scale into my private lexicon and, on a cultural scale, into the shared lexicon that forms a necessary part of all systems of signification. Once a unit has become established in this way, it can be seen to

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<sup>29</sup> Eco deals with this issue – the problem of the first occurrence of cultural units – at length in his *Theory of Semiotics*.

possess both immanent and manifest levels. Consideration of this lexical function thus addresses the interdependence of immanence and manifestation. Implied in the concept of an immanent structure of discourse is an understanding that every semiotic process involves, in part, the functioning of a lexicon of previously manifested structures. Every listener possesses, through experience, a lexicon of previous occurrences: thus, for example, the manner in which a diminished seventh may resolve is known because this has been learned from previous manifestations. Such knowledge is retained in the lexicon so that comparison of a given point of an individual work to the lexicon of previous occurrences, both within the same work and from other works, allows the listener to construct potential implications for the manner in which the work will continue (potential resolutions for the diminished seventh, for example). Significantly, some of these potential outcomes will be realised in the course of the discourse, whilst others will be eliminated.

Lexical function therefore exploits the apparent paradox of the relationship between manifest and immanent level, using what is or has been manifest in order to create what might be. A lexicon forms an immanent structure anterior to discursive manifestation, indeed it is lexical function that actually allows the existence of the immanent level: without lexical function – a remembrance of previous manifestations – discourse, indeed communication, is entirely impossible. Thus the very possibility of discourse may be taken as the empirical proof of the existence of both lexical function, and of the existence of an immanent level of discourse.

However, the fact that lexical function, like all immanent structures, only occurs because of prior manifestation means that it too occurs within the same paradox described above. Nevertheless, the existence of lexical function may be taken as proof of the existence of the immanent level of discourse; indeed, in some ways it *is* the immanent level. The fact that to understand the ambiguity inherent in a diminished seventh I must have experienced different resolutions of previous diminished sevenths does not negate the objective existence of the ambiguity that I experience now - i.e. the immanent structure of simultaneous different *potential* meanings generated by the chord. The result of this is that it is possible to overcome

the difficulties implied simply by accepting the functional distinction between immanence and manifestation provided by lexical function.

Thus, returning to the earlier example, the dominant seventh in a cadence progression is clearly manifest, but it also has an immanent structure of possible outcomes: it will resolve to the tonic, to another chord (as either an interrupted cadence or an augmented sixth), or, finally, there is the remoter possibility that it may not resolve at all. Each of these possible outcomes is implied by the chord, thereby forming an immanent structure of possibilities. However, only when one or other of these possibilities actually occurs in the discourse can any of them be said to be manifest. There are clearly two different processes operative here, even if their origin is the same. Thus, although immanence and manifestation are interdependent processes, nevertheless, *they are different*, and it is this difference that I intend to exploit to distinguish between ambiguity and irony. This difference is significant: immanent structures cannot be ironic.

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This “practical” distinction between immanence and manifestation is shared by Eugene Narmour, whose “Implication-Resolution Model” of musical discourse draws upon lexical function. Narmour’s description of stylistic implications clearly demonstrates that style may be understood in terms of lexical function as a lexicon of intra- and inter-opus “norms”, a “virtual” level of culturally remembered occurrences. The location of an individual work within its stylistic genre thus creates specific implications as the work unfolds, and these implications actually comprise an immanent discursive level:<sup>30</sup>

The recognition of implication in any parametric pattern would depend upon the relative resemblance (degree of functional and conformant synonymy) of the pattern to its predecessors both within and without the piece. Style - intra- and extra opus norms - thus becomes both the source of specific implications and the framework by which they are evaluated. Strength of implication would be directly related to the number of times such and such a realisation had followed such an implication. From without, a listener would recognise an implicative pattern and judge its strength by remembering various

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<sup>30</sup> The most obvious examples are the expectations raised by forms such as sonata form, and the frequent manipulation of these stylistic expectations by composers.



statistical recurrences of syntactic relationships in the style. From within, the realisation of an implication already anticipated by the listener on the basis of prior knowledge and learning would contribute to the systematic aspect of the style. Further repetitions of these implied realisations would serve to reaffirm the systematic (synchronic) aspect, whereas a novel realisation or a novel denial would weaken the system and emphasise the diachronic aspect of style . . . A new style would be established once a novel realisation or a novel denial recurred. Thus within a piece a realisation would always involve synchronic and diachronic feedback in the style.<sup>31</sup>

Narmour's work also highlights an important distinction that will be used to differentiate between immanent and manifest levels: the opposition of "actual" vs. "potential". His "implications" are the *potential* meanings of a given musical occurrence; since the "realisation" of these implications occurs through the reiteration of these, such realisations are manifest, or actualised meanings. In terms of lexical function, implications are "virtual" iterations of the potential meanings produced by the lexicon in advance of the manifested outcome of the music: thus I hear a dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chord and, depending on the context, construct the possible outcomes. Crucially, however, the potential meanings raised by a given point in the discourse exist *only as potential* until one of them is confirmed i.e. until one of them actually occurs, manifested in the discourse. Until that point they form a structure of potential meanings "between" (as it were) the actual discourse and my individual lexicon.

The distinction between actual vs. potential may therefore be used to clarify and effectively separate immanent and manifest levels. Whenever an implication i.e. a potential meaning arises between a manifest structure and a lexicon, then this structure of potential meanings can be said to form the immanent level of the discourse. In contrast, the manifest level of the discourse comprises the actual iterations of these potential meanings, and thus has a more concrete, objective existence within the structure of the discourse. In other words, immanent structures are comprised of *potential* meanings whilst manifest structures are *actualised* meanings.

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<sup>31</sup>Narmour, Eugene (1977) *Beyond Schenkerism: the Need for Alternatives in Music Analysis* p. 127

Although it might appear that the distinction between potential and actual is, in reality, a grey area, nevertheless, drawing a dividing line in this manner is possible:

The knowledge of semiotic structures can be considered either as a description, that is to say as a simple explication of immanent forms, or as a construction, if the world is only structurable, that is to say capable of being “in-formed” by the human mind. In order to exclude any metaphysical quarrel from semiotic theory, we deem it appropriate to limit ourselves to setting up operational concepts, by calling semantic universe (the “there is meaning”) any semiotic system prior to its description and semiotic object its explication with the help of a constructed metalanguage (and of constructed representation languages).<sup>32</sup>

Thus, Greimas draws the dividing line at precisely this same point. The “semantic universe” (his term for the immanent level) is a structure of potential meanings (in fact, all the potential meanings of every word, in its broadest form), composed of the individual potential meanings of each lexeme. The “semiotic object” is the form of the immanent semantic universe manifested in terms of the individual “representational language”. Thus, using a simplistic example, the semantic unit <sigh> is an immanent semantic structure of both the English word “sigh” and, in the Western musical tradition of a descending semitone in a minor key.<sup>33</sup> The important point however, is that the potential structure is specifically identified as being immanent, while the realisation, the “making actual”, in discourse in a representational language (whether in language, music, art etc.) is the manifestation of this immanent form. In short, immanence correlates with potential, manifestation with actual: what is, is manifest; what might be is immanent.

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Before applying this distinction within an analysis of the ambiguities of the opening of Beethoven’s quartet Op. 59 number 3 two important observations regarding the function of such potential meanings must be made. The first of these is that a structure of different potential meanings or resolutions will almost invariably be

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<sup>32</sup> Greimas (1979) p. 151

<sup>33</sup> Monelle traces the original root of this topic to “weeping”, rather than “sighing” (Monelle, Raymond (2000) *The Sense of Music: Semiotic Essays* p. 66-73). He demonstrates that the latter meaning arose once the original signification was forgotten. I refer to this later meaning, however, purely because it is the more commonly understood, not least because of Riemann’s designation of the gesture as a “Mannheim sigh”.

unequal in terms of probability – some of the potential resolutions will be more “expected” than others. This inequality occurs as a result of statistical norms: the more frequently the same outcome occurs for any given discursive occurrence, the more probable its occurrence on subsequent occasions. For example, it is more usual for the cadential dominant seventh to resolve as a perfect cadence than as an interrupted cadence. Therefore, at the point of the dominant seventh chord a perfect cadence, rather than an interrupted cadence is more statistically probable. The result of this unequal probability is that the structure of potential meanings will be “asymmetrical” in terms of expected outcome.

The unequal probability of the potential resolutions of an ambiguous structure is closely related to the concept of “markedness”, a semiotic concept first applied to the analysis of musical discourse by Hatten. He defines the concept simply as “the valuation given to difference”, adding that

Wherever one finds differentiation, there are inevitably oppositions. The terms of such oppositions are weighted with respect to some feature that is distinctive for the opposition. Thus, the two terms of an opposition will have an unequal value or asymmetry, of marked versus unmarked, that has consequences for the meaning of each term.<sup>34</sup>

Hatten uses the example of the opposition of major and minor to demonstrate the function of markedness. He considers that the minor mode is the more marked term in the opposition because it is consistently used to represent the tragic, whereas the major mode may represent not only the opposite – the comic – but also other topical genres not directly related to the tragic (for example, the pastoral, the heroic etc.). The minor mode therefore has a narrower range of expression, and thus possesses greater significance. Similarly, the potential outcomes of a dominant seventh chord are statistically weighted in favour of a resolution as a perfect cadence; the alternative resolution – to an interrupted cadence – is the more marked. Therefore, although the first outcome is more expected, the second is more significant. Thus the particular effect of an interrupted cadence arises because it is less statistically expected and more marked. As a result the axes of such oppositions are

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<sup>34</sup> Hatten (1994) p. 34

asymmetrical, being weighted in favour of the marked terms: as David Lidov states in his introduction to Hatten's work, the marked term of an opposition "tends to be more richly evaluated (positively or negatively) and more special".<sup>35</sup>

The structure of ambiguity will therefore be considered to be similarly unequally weighted, or asymmetrical not only with regard to statistical probability, but also in terms of markedness value. However, it is vital to realise that, despite this unequal distribution the actual constitution of the structure remains unaffected: despite the asymmetry it still comprises an immanent structure of two or more potential outcomes.<sup>36</sup>

Secondly, from the above discussion it is increasingly clear that the immanent level cannot be regarded simply as a latent level of the discourse. On the contrary, it plays as active a part as the manifest structure, bearing as much significance upon the meaning of an utterance.<sup>37</sup> Narmour highlights the importance of its activity: "The signifying implication and the signified realisation are two inseparable, complementary aspects of our temporal experience . . . music theory must take both aspects into account *simultaneously*."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p. x

<sup>36</sup> It is worth noting, however, that many cases of ambiguity do not present only two potential meanings, i.e. not simply one binary opposition on the immanent level. Rather, it is frequently the case that several potential meanings might occur: for example, dominant seventh chords produce three possibilities – resolution as perfect or imperfect cadences or reinterpretation as an augmented sixth chord. In cases such as this, however, both markedness and statistical probability still function because the structure of three potential outcomes forms three binary oppositions: perfect vs. interrupted cadence, perfect cadence vs. reinterpretation and interrupted cadence vs. reinterpretation. In this case an augmented sixth resolution is the least expected and most marked term in both oppositions in which it appears, and is therefore the most significant outcome.

<sup>37</sup> Narmour's description of this process is eloquent:

"In an implication-realisation model, style forms - schemes based on statistical recurrences - would be conceived as forming anterior pools of *implicative* resources on which the idiostructure (and the style structure) would draw. In the actual piece, of course, only some implications would be present. And only some, not all, would be realised. Thus the structure of a work would be composed of the realisations of implications presented *against* the background of specific implications *and* specific non-realizations which the idiostructure and the style patterns simultaneously invoke . . . As in microphysics, where the temporal "acts" of particles are studied by the "tracings" they leave, so behind each piece of music would lie a "shadowgraph" of unrealised implications whose *implied* (unrealised) *structure* would contribute to the richness and depth of the actual realisations of the idiostructure and the style structure." Narmour (1977) p. 212, emphasis original

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p.211, emphasis original

To paraphrase Narmour, what a work *is not* is as important as what it actually is. This is a purely logical consideration: since the presence of one term of an opposition always implies the presence of the other term, part of the meaning of every manifested element occurs because of what the meaning of that word excludes. Therefore, since words, as lexemes, have more than one potential meaning, then these potential meanings also help define, negatively, what the contextual meaning of the word is as it occurs in discourse. Narmour states that these rejected meanings form an immanent level that is an active part of determining the meaning of the manifested discourse.<sup>39</sup> The implications raised, and subsequently rejected during the process of discourse form part of this structure, which remains as part of the discourse adding a type of “negative” meaning to the “positive” manifested meaning.

I consider that ambiguity presents a particular effect of this active immanent level upon the discourse, producing an semantic structure of potential redundancies/meanings. This immanent structure arises as a result of lexical function: comparison of a given point in the current discourse with the reader’s lexicon produces a structure of two or more potential meanings/outcomes (Narmour’s “implications”) for one element of discourse. These potential meanings, however, remain as potential until they are either confirmed or rejected. As soon as one potential meaning is chosen over the other – confirmed through the context in which it occurs – the alternative meaning is no longer a possibility for the manifest structure of the utterance and the ambiguity is resolved. The chosen meaning will be confirmed by reiteration and simultaneously the alternate meanings will be negated and eliminated. The rejected “meanings” remain dormant within the context of the current discourse, contributing meaning in the “negative” manner described above.

Crucially, in cases of ambiguity the immanent level is an active part of the discourse: it directly affects the meaning of the discourse, producing the particular effect of several potential meanings simultaneously. Thus, through ambiguity the immanent level is not, like Narmour’s “shadowgraph”, relegated to a position “behind” the

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<sup>39</sup> He uses the term “shadowgraph”.



meaning, contributing only “negatively”. Rather, it is an active, vital part of the discourse. Moreover, since every word, and indeed every musical occurrence possesses “lexical” ambiguity to a greater or lesser degree, ambiguity in discourse may be taken as a macro indication of the microstructures of ambiguity that continuously occur upon every word. Discursive ambiguity is, in other words, an attenuation of lexical ambiguity, a particular effect of the active immanent level upon the manifest structure of the discourse, used for aesthetic end.

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### The opening of Op. 59 number 3

The following analysis is intended to demonstrate the distinction between ambiguity and irony (via that between immanence and manifestation) in practice upon one of the most striking instances of tonal ambiguity in Beethoven’s entire oeuvre – the opening bars of quartet Op. 59 number 3. The entire introduction to this movement is essentially a prolongation of tonal ambiguity: consequently ambiguity is an aesthetic element of particular importance to the whole movement. Moreover, the unequal statistical weighting of the potential outcomes of an ambiguous structure is particularly relevant to this work. Throughout, Beethoven consistently chooses the resolution of each harmonically-ambiguous chord that is the statistically least expected, most marked, and thus most significant of the possible outcomes in order to create the effect of this passage.

As was considered above, the diminished chord that begins the movement is an ambiguous gesture:<sup>40</sup> the fact that this chord could resolve several ways produces several potential meanings for the chord, several “virtual” redundancies “between” the actual manifest chord and the listener’s lexicon. (Diagram 1 above.) According to the distinction outlined above, the fact that these meanings remain only *potential* at this point in the discourse means that they must be considered as part of the

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<sup>40</sup> This statement reflects the historical context in which this quartet appears: with the breakdown of the “functional” nature of tonality that occurred throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Century diminished chords became less ambiguous, their function becoming more colouristic.

immanent structure of discourse, since they do not appear in the actual, manifest structure.

Ex. 7.1 Op. 59 no 3 1st Movement

Introduzione.  
Andante con moto (♩ = 69)

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

12

25

Allegro vivace (♩ = 88)

34

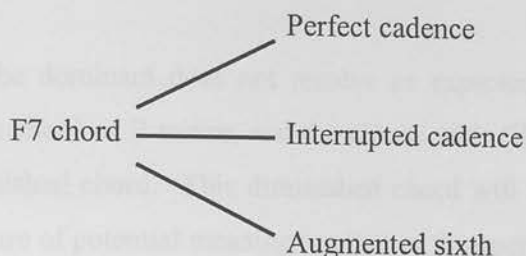
39

The manner in which this diminished chord “resolves” is particularly interesting. In light of the following F7 chord, the diminished chord becomes re-interpreted as a dominant minor ninth without the root (F), the F# being reinterpreted enharmonically as G flat. It is important to note that, whilst in the lexicon of the “ideal listener” such a resolution would have been one of the possible redundancies, I would suggest that it would have occurred as one of the least likely – diminished sevenths do not “normally” resolve this way.

The dominant seventh in the second bar possesses the same type of structure as that of the preceding chord: since it can resolve several ways it produces a structure of opposed potential meanings. Thus, like the diminished chord, the dominant seventh can be said to possess an ambiguous structure, since this structure occurs on the immanent level of the discourse<sup>41</sup>. As with the first chord, Beethoven reinterprets, rather than resolves the F7 chord, transforming it enharmonically into a “German” augmented sixth (the E flat becoming a D#), which resolves in a conventional manner to a second inversion A minor. This reinterpretation of the dominant seventh is the least expected of the potential outcomes of the F7 chord:

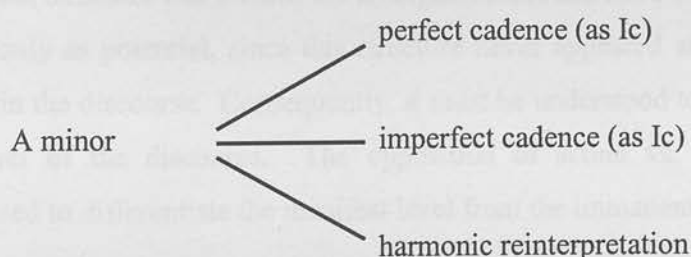
<sup>41</sup> It should be noted, once more, that not all of the potential resolutions of the dominant chord possess equal statistical probability. The resolution as a perfect cadence is far more stylistically usual, whilst the other potential resolutions are more marked. Therefore the manner in which this chord actually resolves - to one of the marked possibilities - is far more significant than might otherwise be the case.

Diagram 2



The fact that the A minor chord is in second inversion tends to imply that the chord is cadential i.e. as Ic in either a perfect or imperfect cadence. Whilst the chord itself is not usually regarded as inherently ambiguous, as a diminished or even a dominant seventh might be, it is still possible, as indicated, to construct at least two potential resolutions for the A minor chord. However, the enharmonic reinterpretation of the previous two chords raises a third possibility, the potential that this chord might not resolve in the “normal”, or “expected” manner at all, but rather that it too might be reinterpreted. Therefore, due to the fact that this A minor chord has at least three potential resolutions, shown below, it may be regarded as possessing, within the context of this specific discourse, an ambiguous structure, similar to that of the preceding chords.

Diagram 3



The D7 chord in bar 6 does in fact cause the A minor chord to be reinterpreted as the supertonic in an implied II – V – I, rather than as the tonic – another unconventional resolution. Furthermore, on the first two beats of bar 6, this D7 possesses ambiguity of the same type as that of the earlier dominant seventh in bar 3. However, the descent to C in the bass on the third beat of the bar rules out the possibility of an imperfect cadence and therefore appears to unambiguously imply a resolution to G major.

Once again the dominant does not resolve as expected, avoiding the cadence by moving to the chord of B minor, and the phrase ends (if it can be called an end) on another diminished chord. This diminished chord will of course possess the same type of structure of potential meanings as that of the opening chord (though probably with fewer possibilities) – the same ambiguity.

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This brief analysis has attempted to demonstrate three key issues regarding both the relationship between irony and ambiguity and the particular function of this relationship within this quartet. The first of these is the manner in which the opposition of potential vs. actual may be used to differentiate the immanent level from the manifest. Each of the ambiguities that occurred in the passage arose from the simultaneous existence of several possible outcomes, i.e. several potential meanings, for one chord. However, these structures of simultaneous, different potential meanings were never actualised in the discourse. Rather, each ambiguity “resolved” from a structure of several potential meanings to one actual outcome, albeit the outcome that was the least expected according to stylistic conventions. The oppositional structure that formed the ambiguity must therefore be considered to have existed only as potential, since this structure never appeared as an actualised structure within the discourse. Consequently, it must be understood to be part of the immanent level of the discourse. The opposition of actual vs. potential may therefore be used to differentiate the manifest level from the immanent.

The distinction between actual and potential, correlating with manifest and immanent levels is vital: as a result, the immanent structure of potential meanings of each of the chords must be regarded as ambiguous, rather than ironic. As was seen in previous chapters, every case of irony necessarily involves a process of objectification. For objectification to occur, however, requires that both of the opposed elements that comprise the ironic structure occur in the *manifest* structure of the discourse. Therefore, as will be considered below, the simultaneous oppositional structures of the individual chords in the above example cannot be regarded as



ironic, even though they individually comprise several simultaneous contradictory meanings. These structures exist on the *immanent* level of the discourse, preventing the process of objectification from occurring; consequently, each must be understood as ambiguous, rather than ironic.

This is the second point regarding the relationship between immanent and manifest levels: if the distinction between them is not maintained, or is ignored, then irony and ambiguity appear to possess the same structure – a single structure comprising simultaneous, contradictory/different elements. Consequently, each chord in the example would need to be understood as being inherently ironic; not only the inherent tonal ambiguity of the diminished chords, but also even the “lexical” ambiguity of the other chords would have to be regarded as irony. Beyond this, virtually every utterance, musical, linguistic or otherwise would have to be considered ironic, since a structure of opposed meanings could conceivably be constructed for almost every element of these utterances.

However, introducing the distinction between immanent and manifest levels, as was demonstrated in the analysis, allows a clear distinction to be drawn between irony and ambiguity. Because the structure of opposed potential meanings for each of the chords occurs on the immanent level, the chords themselves can be regarded, in terms of their tonal function, as possessing an ambiguous, rather than an ironic structure.

This is closely related to the third point regarding the example, which concerns the manner in which Beethoven uses ambiguity within this passage. Although harmonic ambiguity is, to a certain degree, expected in slow introductions here it is strikingly foregrounded. Since ambiguity continually recurs as a property of each of the chords it can be said to occur as an actual semantic element of these bars: ambiguity effectively functions as a type of musical topic, an entity in its own right. (As will be seen, this use of ambiguity as a semantic unit or topic is particularly prominent in the third movement of Op. 130.)

The ambiguity that recurs through each of the chords in this passage, however, is in reality simply the “lexical ambiguity” inherent in diminished and dominant seventh chords, the latent ambiguity that creates several potential meanings for virtually any given word or note. Whilst this appears to negate, or at least undermine, the importance of the ambiguity that occurs in this passage, it is precisely this lexical ambiguity that Beethoven uses to produce the effect of this passage. In other words, he specifically exploits the ambiguity inherent within the system of tonal harmony in order to produce the aesthetic effect of this particular passage.

Throughout the bars that were analysed, Beethoven, by a series of harmonic “reinterpretations”, avoids resolving any of the chords in the “usual” or expected manner. Rather, in each case he consistently chooses the potential “resolution” of the ambiguous chords that is the most unconventional, most marked and least expected stylistically. The result is twofold. Firstly, it produces a continual avoidance of resolution and tonicisation – within the first eight bars of the movement the keys of B flat major/minor, then A minor and finally G major are variously implied, though none is established. This is combined with (indeed contributes to) the constant undermining of the listener’s expectations regarding the resolution of the ambiguities created by the individual chords. The iteration of unconventional, unexpected resolutions is significant: over the course of these bars the listener actually comes to expect that the least statistically probable harmonic procedure will be the one that actually occurs – the stylistically unexpected has become the most probable outcome.

Paradoxically, in such a case the conventional resolution will eventually become more significant than the unconventional resolutions: the reversal of statistical probability within the specific work will produce a corresponding change in the markedness values, with the “conventional” term becoming the most unexpected and the most marked - in short, more significant. This reversal is crucial for the subsequent course of the entire movement: Beethoven uses the ambiguity of this passage, together with the unconventional resolution of these ambiguities and the

continual undermining of the listener's expectations to produce a subtle irony when the tonic is finally established.

The reversal that occurs in the introduction produces an incongruity between the harmonic processes within the context of this movement and the "norms" of tonal harmony, an incongruity which gives rise to irony. Through this reversal the unexpected becomes the "norm" of this movement, whereas the conventional "norm" – the "usual" process of tonal harmony – is objectified. This objectification occurs primarily through exaggeration: the manner in which the tonic of the movement is finally established, at bar 43, is almost exaggeratedly simple – the cadential progression is so straightforward as to verge on the banal. Moreover, the point where it occurs – 14 bars into the Allegro – is really too late, undermining the establishment of the tonality.

However, this objectification also occurs because of the opposition between the exaggerated conventionality of this moment and the unconventional introduction that precedes it. Because of the reversal of markedness values and statistical probability, this exaggeratedly conventional cadence is actually both unexpected and marked. Thus the fact that when the "conventional" does actually occur it appears both unexpectedly and exaggeratedly means that the overt conventionality of the moment becomes objectified. In other words it is ironically undermined; the conventional becomes objectified, its very conventionality becoming the object of a subtle satire.

Thus, although the analysis focused on the ambiguous structures of the individual chords, the ambiguity of the introduction actually results in an ironic effect – indeed, irony is important both within this introduction and the whole movement. The crucial point for the current discussion, however, is that this irony is distinct from the ambiguity analysed above. The ambiguity in the passage occurs within the structure of the individual chords; the ironic effect occurs as a result of a separate process that recurs across the entire passage. Thus, whilst the opening diminished seventh itself is not ironic, but ambiguous, the manner in which the ambiguity of the chord is resolved produces irony: all of the ambiguous chords resolve unconventionally,

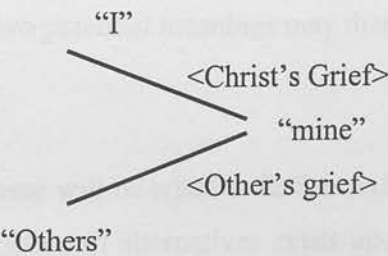
undermining expectation and convention, and finally the establishment of the tonic. It is vital to understand though, that this irony occurs only because of the recurrence of such unconventional resolutions – individually these are not ironic. Therefore, although ambiguity and irony both occur in the passage, they occur as distinct processes. The fact that the introduction involves both makes it even more important to differentiate between them, in order to better understand the functioning of this movement.

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The Structure of Alternatives

Further significant examples of ambiguity from the later quartets will be considered below. First, however, several important additions must be made to the proposed distinction between irony and ambiguity. These arise from the fact that there are some ambiguities – unresolved ambiguities – where the distinction between actual and potential meanings, and immanent and manifest levels, appears less successful in distinguishing ambiguity from irony. For example, the ambiguity of the final two lines of Herbert's *The Sacrifice*, quoted earlier, clearly comprises two iterated meanings: "I" and "mine" iterate <Christ's grief>; "others" and "mine" iterate <other's grief>. This structure is represented in the following diagram:

Diagram 5



Both these meanings appear to be iterated in the structure of the discourse; either can be constructed from within the discourse itself, without recourse to a "virtual" iteration from a lexicon. The poem therefore appears to contain two incongruent

meanings on the manifested level simultaneously; according to the earlier definition, these lines would have to be considered ironic, rather than ambiguous.

However, the basic definition still holds: the above structure – two meanings converging on one element – is still a structure of possibilities, rather than of manifest actualities, still ambiguous rather than ironic. In this example the meaning of the word “mine” is evaluated in retrospect and is found to produce two possible meanings, either of which could form a complete, iterated structure were it not for the existence of the possibility of another, contrary meaning. In other words, the two meanings for the text exist as two alternatives.

Crucially, these two alternative meanings converge on only one manifest element. Thus to read either of the meanings requires the negation of the other: to read the text as “Christ’s Grief” requires the reinterpretation of each of the constituent parts of the sentence, with the result that the alternative meaning – “Other’s Grief” – is rejected. Therefore each element of the text is susceptible to two alternative, mutually exclusive interpretations.

The possibility of alternative readings produces a requirement for further redundancy to create a single meaning, i.e. in order for the meaning of the lines to be certain. Neither of the meanings can be regarded as a sole, actualised meaning for the discourse; however, neither is redundant enough to exclude the possibility of the other. These two potential meanings may therefore be considered to form a structure of alternatives.

The decisive issue will be whether further redundancy will “resolve” the structure or not. If the structure of alternatives exists upon the immanent level of the discourse then adding to one of the alternative readings will “resolve” the structure from several meanings to one single meaning, essentially by confirming one of the possible meanings and negating the others. If, however, it exists on the manifest level, then no resolution to a single meaning would be possible. A structure of manifest incongruent elements – i.e. an ironic structure – can never be negated by



further redundancy; further reiteration of one element would never remove the objective existence of the other element. Rather, both elements always remain present in the discourse as a manifest structure of simultaneous incongruity.

As an example of this, consider again the opening lines of the poem *New Corn*:

Swiftly the years, beyond recall.  
Solemn the stillness of this spring morning. 42

This poem was previously identified as ironic, an extreme example of a discourse constructed from two complete but opposed semantic structures. The important point here, however, is that no matter how much redundancy were added to either of the two elements of the poem there would never be sufficient to negate the opposed element: the objective, manifest existence of both incongruent elements will prevent this “resolution” – irony will always occur.

In contrast, further redundancy does resolve the final lines of *The Sacrifice*. The substitution of the lines “Only let others say *of me*, when I am dead, never was grief like mine” for the originals produces a simple iteration of the first person (“me” – “I” – “mine”). This negates the possibility of the alternative meaning: this alternative reading simply ceases to exist and the structure of simultaneous opposed meanings “resolves” to one single meaning.<sup>43</sup> (It must be added that the alternative meaning could equally be iterated in a similar manner.)

Whilst this crass violation of these lines is regrettable, it demonstrates the crucial point that a structure of alternative meanings for one manifest element will always remain a structure of potentials; it will always, and can only, function on the immanent level of the discourse. Despite the fact that both meanings are, to a certain degree, iterated in the discourse, the possibility that the structure could resolve means that these alternatives remain only immanent possibilities, rather than manifest actualities – the poem is ambiguous, rather than ironic.

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42 Waley (1962) p. 60

43 Actually, the alternative reading could still be constructed, but doing so would render the lines grammatically incomprehensible.

The following example, often given in discussions of human perception, further demonstrates the ambiguity of such structures of alternative potential meanings.



This drawing (W.E. Hill's *My Wife and Mother in Law*), containing two contrasting images – an old lady and a young woman – might at first be considered strikingly ironic: age and youth – cultural opposites – are combined in one entity, objectifying the transience of both. It appears as though this dual structure comprises two manifest “meanings” – the outline of both ladies must clearly exist, or else we would be unable to see either. As such it appears as though these different meanings cannot be considered to be potential. Moreover, to see only one image I must ignore the objective presence of the other in the drawing: as Booth argues, once the duality of meaning in such cases is apprehended it is impossible to see either reading as wholly convincing on its own.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, it seems that only by ignoring the irony could this structure be “resolved” in the manner possible in ambiguity.

This drawing, however, is actually an unresolved ambiguity. The two different “meanings” exist in the *same* manifest elements: every line of the drawing is susceptible to two different, mutually exclusive, interpretations. Interpreting the

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<sup>44</sup> Booth (1974) p. 128

drawing as either of the images involves the momentary negation of the existence of the other; to see the image of the young woman requires a complete reinterpretation of the meaning of the constituent parts of the drawing, removing the possibility of the existence of the alternative image. The two images do not therefore exist simultaneously, rather they are alternative readings of the same discourse. In effect, by viewing either of the images I momentarily transform the duality of meaning of the drawing into a single meaning, thereby “resolving” the ambiguity.

Thus this drawing evinces exactly the same type of structure as that seen in Herbert’s poem – a structure of alternatives that may be resolved by further redundancy. In such cases of unresolved ambiguity the reader’s lexicon supplies potential redundancies for the given manifest occurrence. The alternative readings of an unresolved ambiguity are “projected” as potential meanings into a virtual “future” of the discourse (even if that future is never actually manifested) as an immanent structure “between” the discourse and the reader’s lexicon.

The potential for resolution, however, indicates a lack of semantic closure. Since a structure of alternative meanings is an immanent structure then it cannot possess syntactic closure: as soon as closure occurs the resulting structure will exist as an actualised part of the *manifest* level of the discourse.<sup>45</sup> Rather, in cases of ambiguity there is only the *potential* for closure. Both of these examples may therefore be considered to be semantically “open”, lacking semantic closure on the manifest level of the discourse. Indeed, all cases of ambiguity produce such “open”

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<sup>45</sup> According to Meyer closure is always a result of “syntactic relationships”: closure can only occur within syntactic systems, where, by definition, “the elements of the parameter can be segmented into discrete, non-uniform relationships so that the similarities and differences between them are definable, constant, and proportional” (Meyer, Leonard (1989) *Style and Music: Theory, History and Ideology* p. 14). Thus, within the system of tonal music he identifies melody, rhythm and harmony as syntactic parameters, since all of these make hierarchic structures possible and “establish mobile processes and closural articulations” (ibid. p. 15). He considers that it is only such syntactic systems that the criteria for closure can be established – since a system of uniform elements, or a graded continuum is lacking in definition and delineation, difference and relationship cannot be generated. Therefore such systems are devoid of both impetus (i.e. the “movement” created by difference and hierarchy) and closure (since all elements are equal, none is truly an “ending”). Significantly, he also considers that closure is essentially defined by the perception of the listener. Syntactic systems produce differentiation and closure; but syntax itself is produced by cultural convention rooted in human perception and cognition. Therefore, closure may be said to be a result of human perception.

structures – immanent structures of potential redundancy, partially manifest yet lacking semantic closure.

In contrast, the fact that irony is formed from two distinct, manifest discursive elements, rather than the structure of alternatives seen in ambiguity, means that the incongruity that arises from these elements also occurs on the manifest level. This manifestation prevents the resolution of the structure: the syntactic closure of these individual elements prevents their negation by further redundancy – as was seen, the incongruity will still function despite this further redundancy.<sup>46</sup> If such ironic structures did not possess closure then there would be the potential for the type of “resolution” seen in ambiguous structures. Therefore, the fact that such resolution cannot occur is attributable to the presence, to some degree, of semantic closure.

Therefore, irony will be understood as a structure composed of two or more incongruous, “closed” elements simultaneously, existing upon the manifest level of the discourse. In contrast the lack of closure in ambiguity means that its structure of two or more simultaneous potential elements, existing as a structure of alternatives upon the immanent level of the discourse, can be considered to be a semantically “open”.

The crucial point about the “open” structure of ambiguity is that in such structures no process of objectification can occur. Throughout previous chapters objectification was considered to be the process that defines irony, arising as an effect of its structure, whereby one viewpoint or element of such an ironic structure is preferred over another. In all cases the non-preferred term becomes the objectified “victim” of the irony. However, within ambiguous structures such as those considered above the contradictory elements exist only as potential redundancies, each of the alternative

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<sup>46</sup> Although it is possible to view an ironic discourse as non-ironic, this involves *ignoring* a part of the total structure (or the effect of that particular part) rather than re-interpreting the substance of the discourse. For example, to consider a subtle irony such as the second movement of Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony simply as a non-ironic waltz requires ignoring the fact that it occurs in 5/4 time: this metre is opposed to the obvious waltz gestures, producing both “waltz” and “non-waltz” simultaneously. Ignoring the existence of one term of this opposition, however, does not negate the opposition, simply because both terms of the opposition actually exist as distinct elements of the discourse. Far from removing the irony in the discourse, this process simply does not recognise it.

meanings arising as a “projection” on the immanent, rather than manifest level of the discourse. The whole structure therefore possesses only the potential for semantic closure.

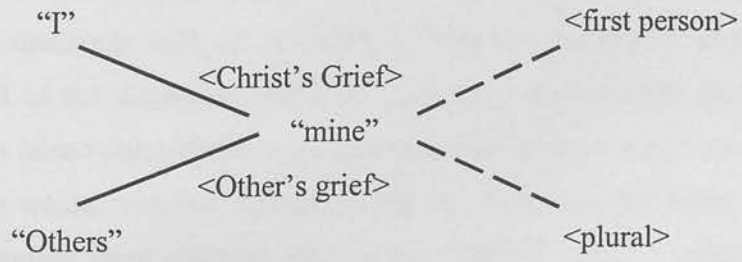
The very nature of this ambiguous structure means that any preferencing of one of the alternative elements over another would “resolve” the structure by effectively adding redundancy to the preferred meaning. As above, this extra redundancy would iterate the preferred meaning whilst simultaneously negating the rejected term – in effect one of the alternative meanings would be chosen over the others. Consequently, the whole structure would resolve from several potential, immanent meanings to only one actualised meaning. Accordingly, the process of objectification simply cannot function in immanent structures such as those considered: even though they consist of contradictory elements they must be considered to be ambiguous, rather than ironic.

\*                      \*                      \*

### The Structure of Ambiguity

As was stated above ambiguity differs from irony not only in regard to the process of objectification, but also in terms of structure. This may be seen through refining the diagram derived from Herbert’s *Sacrifice*. While both meanings of the last lines may apparently be seen in the manifest structure, the lack of semantic closure actually projects them as an immanent structure of alternative potential meanings identical to the ambiguities in the introduction to Op 59, number 3.

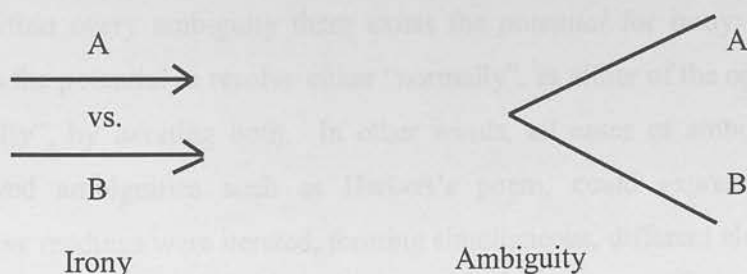
Diagram 6





The “direction”, as it were, of this diagram is important. The left side represents a semantically “open” structure of two “meanings” meeting at one point in the manifest structure. This type of occurrence produces a structure of alternatives – the projection “forward” of potential iterations by the reader’s lexical function. This structure of potential meanings (represented by the right hand side of the diagram) is the structure of ambiguity – an immanent structure of two or more alternative potential meanings connected to a single element of the manifest discourse. Significantly, the left hand side of the diagram is evaluated retrospectively, or “backwards”, whilst the right hand side, i.e. the ambiguity, is evaluated “forwards” as a projection of “what might be”. The left hand side of the diagram gives rise to the right, but it is only with this right hand structure that ambiguity occurs.

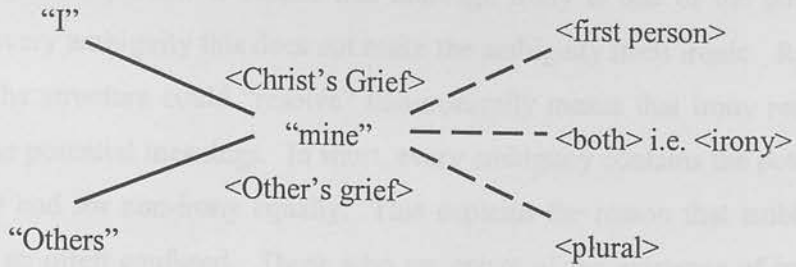
Crucially, this ambiguous structure differs from that of irony, which was considered to be two simultaneous but different manifest structures. Whilst irony may be considered in terms of parallel lines, ambiguity must be understood as diverging lines:



However, in every ambiguity there is a third potential resolution. In the example from Herbert’s poem further redundancy of either potential meaning (either “Christ’s grief” or “other’s grief”) will resolve the ambiguity, negating the rejected term. If *both* alternatives are actually iterated, however, then the structure of simultaneous contradictory meanings will be transformed from the immanent level onto the manifest level of the discourse. Such an occurrence would allow the process of objectification (since objectification *can* occur on the manifest level) and as a result the ambiguity would “resolve” ironically, not as “either-or” but rather as “both”. There are therefore three potential meanings – “Christ’s grief”, “other’s grief” or

“both” – of which the first two are unambiguous, and the last ironic. In light of this, the ambiguous structure of this poem may be regarded more like this:

Diagram 7



This alternative outcomes of the structure (the right hand side of the diagram) may be expressed more simply still, as  $\langle A \text{ vs. } B \text{ vs. } A + B \rangle$ , which itself may be reduced to a fundamental opposition:

irony vs. non-irony	
A+B	A or B

Thus within every ambiguity there exists the *potential* for irony: the ambiguity contains the potential to resolve either “normally”, as either of the opposed terms, or “ironically”, by iterating both. In other words, all cases of ambiguity, including unresolved ambiguities such as Herbert’s poem, could express irony if both alternative readings were iterated, forming simultaneous, different elements.

The manner in which the Grosse Fuge unfolds from the ambiguity of the Overtura can be understood as just such an occurrence. As was seen in the fourth chapter of this work, the multiple fragments of the Overtura, coming at the beginning of the movement, produced a powerful ambiguity, i.e. several potential outcomes for the manner in which the movement might continue. Throughout the subsequent course of the movement, however, each of the outcomes actually occurred, in incongruous juxtaposition with each other. This may be understood as a resolution to the “third possibility” inherent in every ambiguity. In other words the ambiguity of the Overtura resolved ironically throughout the course of the Grosse Fuge not as any one

of the individual themes but, paradoxically, as all of them: the ambiguity of the Overture “resolved” into an ironic structure.

Nevertheless, it is important to realise that although irony is one of the possible outcomes of every ambiguity this does not make the ambiguity itself ironic. Rather, the fact that the structure could “resolve” non-ironically means that irony remains only one of the potential meanings. In short, every ambiguity contains the potential for both irony and for non-irony equally. This explains the reason that ambiguity and irony are so often confused. Those who are aware of the existence of irony – “tuned” to irony, if you will – will feel the potential for irony in an ambiguous utterance. Indeed we may feel this potential so strongly that we confuse the potential for irony with the actual manifestation of irony: in short, we come to regard the immanent structure as manifest. This tendency to confuse ambiguity for irony is most acute in the case of an ambiguity that, as in Herbert’s poem, does not actually resolve either way, leaving an “open” structure of potentials with no further iteration. The temptation to regard such an unresolved ambiguity as ironic is strong: at the point of the ambiguity there appears to exist a structure of simultaneous different meanings – the structure of irony.

However, ambiguity (including unresolved ambiguity) always produces an immanent structure of alternative potential iterations, the lack of closure in such “open” structures producing the need of continuation (or ending). This results in the projections of “virtual” meanings into the “future” of the discourse, of which one is the potential for “ironic” resolution. The possibility of the resolution of this structure, i.e. for a non-ironic outcome, though, is absolutely vital. Even though one of the potential outcomes of the ambiguity is ironic the fact that, as was seen, ambiguity can resolve non-ironically prevents the process of objectification, and thus prevents the unresolved structure from being ironic in itself. In other words, in a case of ambiguity even though I may be aware of the *potential* for irony in the utterance, and even if I choose to understand it as irony, there is always the possibility for a non-ironic resolution. As such, the ambiguous utterance itself cannot be considered to be ironic.

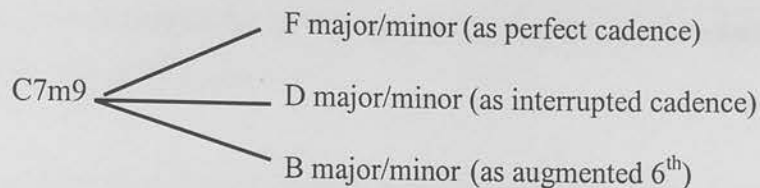
Moreover, not only is ambiguity not a correlative of irony, but irony (in all its forms, including satire, parody and Romantic irony) is not, as Sheinberg describes it, a “mode of ambiguity”, but rather a distinct, separate phenomenon. Ambiguity is a particular effect of the *immanent* structure of discourse upon the meaning (purport) of an utterance. This effect is distinct from irony, which is an effect of the interaction of different structures on the *manifest* level of the discourse. To consider ambiguity and irony to be, in essence, one and the same thing is to weaken both: they are different – two individual, powerful modes of expression.

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The distinction between irony and ambiguity is particularly important in relation to Beethoven’s quartets: the late quartets in particular are almost synonymous with the ambiguous and the equivocal. However, as has been demonstrated, there are also significant instances of irony within these quartets. Therefore, if the distinction between irony and ambiguity is not maintained, or if the two phenomena are elided, then the difference in the effect and the purport of these instances will be negated: the subtlety and eloquence of the works will be less well perceived.

Ambiguity of the type seen within the opening of the quartet Op. 59 number 3 is found frequently within the later quartets. One of the most obvious examples is the finale of the Op. 135 quartet, whose Grave introduction – based upon the famous “Muss es Sein?” theme – uses the same type of lexical ambiguity seen above. Although F minor does appear as tonal centre in the second and eighth bars it is never really established as the tonic in the introduction. The fact that F appears as an implied dominant 7<sup>th</sup> in bar 4 shifts the tonal centre away from the tonic; that the consequent B flat itself occurs as a dominant 7<sup>th</sup> continues this process. In addition, the frequent use of diminished harmony (bars 6,7 and 9 – 11) and the change of mode in bars 4 and 5 create further tonal ambiguity. Finally, Beethoven uses the inherent ambiguity of the dominant minor 9<sup>th</sup> chord through the last three bars of the introduction (bars 10 – 12). This chord could resolve several ways (diagram 8), creating an ambiguous structure:

## Diagram 8



Ex. 7.2 Op. 135 4th Movement  
Grave, ma non troppo tratto

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

5

10

Adagio

Allegro

*p*

*cresc.*

*f*

*ff*

*dim.*

*p*

*pp*

*f*

In fact it does not actually resolve; the Allegro starts on the dominant, and F major, the tonic, is not really established until bar 24. Indeed throughout the first section of the allegro the tonic is somewhat undermined by both avoidance of strong cadences and by the continual use of the F as a dominant 7<sup>th</sup>. Even the final cadence of the section (bars 40/41) is undermined by the weaker first-inversion dominant and immediate deflection from F to E in preparation for the A major of bar 45. In other



words, the tonal ambiguity that characterises the introduction may be seen to inform the tonal structure of the rest of the movement.

Ambiguity is in fact an important element of much of the entire quartet. The second movement, for example, is a masterpiece of the rhythmic ambiguity seen so frequently in Beethoven's scherzos. In addition, the opening movement is strikingly similar in effect to both Op. 59 number 3 and, as will be seen, to the third movement of Op. 130. Moments of ambiguity mark many of the structural landmarks of the movement, obscuring their function and consequently, the overall form. For example, as with the Op. 59 quartet the tonal ambiguity of the opening four bars is juxtaposed with a harmonically and melodically simple first theme, leading to a certain comic undermining of the tonic. This comic effect is heightened by the mocking of the pathos of the low, semitone "sigh" gestures in bars 1 and 3 juxtaposed by the high, syncopated gestures in the second and fourth bars:

The use of ambiguity here (and indeed throughout the whole work) is clearly related to those seen in Op. 59 number 3. Such ambiguities, though, are perhaps used most eloquently in the third movement of the Op. 130 quartet, being employed to subtly undermine the forms and principles of Classicism. This procedure is significant given the context of the rest of the quartet: the undermining of the Classical style in this movement presages the ironic paradoxes seen in the Cavatina and the Grosse Fuge.

Ex. 7.3 Op. 135 1st Movement  
**Allegretto**

The musical score for the first movement of Op. 135, marked **Allegretto**, shows the first four bars for four instruments: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The score includes various musical notations such as rests, eighth notes, and sixteenth notes. Dynamic markings include *sf* (sforzando) and *p* (piano). The Viola part includes a *pizz* (pizzicato) marking. The Violoncello part includes a *p* marking and a double bar line with a repeat sign.



### Op. 130 Third Movement

The interpretation of the “*poco scherzoso*” marking at the beginning of the movement is significant for any subsequent reading. There are two possibilities. Following Kerman and Steinberg it may be understood as a suggestion that the opening ‘sigh’ must not be taken too seriously, as mildly deceptive wit rather than pathos.<sup>47</sup> (That the indication appears over these very bars strengthens this viewpoint.) Alternatively, it may be applied more generally to the whole movement: the whole must be taken a little jokingly, not simply the particular gesture of the opening bars.

This second viewpoint allows that not only is the apparent emotionalism of the opening gesture to be taken with a pinch of salt, but also that the overtly ‘Classical’, Rococo-like movement that it presages is not entirely what it seems either. Compared to the other movements of the Op. 130 quartet this movement is undoubtedly light-hearted. Nevertheless, under its refinement and grace there is a serious point; Beethoven’s ‘jokes’ are often barbed, the comic and jocular masking the profound.

It is perhaps due to this disarming surface, as well as to the scope of the other movements of the Op. 130 quartet, that this movement is often all but overlooked.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> See Kerman (1967) p. 317 and Steinberg (1994) p. 233

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Steinberg, Lam, Cooper, Kinderman and Daverio, all of whom spend precious little time on this movement.

Even Kerman spends very little time in analysis, merely pointing out one or two “subtleties of structure”<sup>49</sup> and the (striking) manner in which the opening gesture links the movement to those around it. Instead, he prefers simply to state his admiration:

It offers such a spontaneous flow of musical notions, so perfectly disposed and so brilliantly scored, such an enchantment of intelligence and warmth and airy poise, that analytical formulations seem somehow helplessly beside the point . . . this beautifully ordered cascade of melody, dance, and sheer sonority really does not want to be separated.<sup>50</sup>

On this last point both Imeson and Chua obviously disagree with Kerman. Imeson analysis of the formal structure of this movement in terms of the interaction of levels of ‘voice’ is reminiscent of Carolyn Abbate. Chua’s analysis is perhaps closest to that given below. He demonstrates not only striking subtleties, but also a fundamental disparity between the ‘surface’ of the movement and the processes that underlie it. He considers that throughout this movement there is a lack of closure, produced through a constant undermining of cadence, even though, paradoxically, much of the thematic material comprises cadential clichés. There is therefore a disjunction between the thematic and tonal structure, whereby the tonal structure constantly pushes toward closure even as the thematic structure continuously evades it. Chua considers that this contradiction results in formal ambiguity, with the evasion of closure obscuring or even precluding formal landmarks. He concludes that this ambiguity in turn produces the effect of a critique: the lack of closure and the disparity between the harmonic and thematic structures challenges the very basis of the Classicism invoked by the movement<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 317

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p. 316

<sup>51</sup> “It is never clear where the initial theme begins, or where exactly the exposition and recapitulation end, or for that matter where they start, or where the development and coda begin, or at what point the tonal conflict is set up or resolved. It is not that these things do not happen; it is just that the fundamental elements of Classical construction do not synchronise to articulate the critical moments in the form at any point . . . In this Andante, Beethoven is playing not merely with the Classical conventions he evokes but with the Classical system itself.” Chua (1995) p. 186-188

However, as Lam observes, “sonata form is a style, not a form”.<sup>52</sup> As will be seen, throughout this movement Beethoven evokes the *style* of a Classical sonata form, without necessarily subscribing to the form. The fundamental opposition of the movement occurs not so much between a traditional first and second theme as between an ambiguous structure and an evocation or reminiscence of the apparent certainty or clarity of Classicism. Indeed, much of this movement is clearly related to an earlier aesthetic. The harmonic structure of the first bars of the first theme, for example is strikingly simple; the repetition of the material and the periodicity of the phrases are also quite conventional. Finally, the part writing in particular subscribes to the ethos of the Classical quartet: the melodic material is distributed equally through the parts, often with significant imitation, resulting in the independence of parts – the “conversation” – enshrined in Classical procedure.

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise the difference between the “Classical” elements of this movement and those of the replacement finale of the quartet. Unlike the replacement finale there is no real element of stylisation in this movement: although there is clearly an evocation of a classical aesthetic, the music contains none of the exaggerated clichés and banal passagework exhibited by the alternative finale. The lack of exaggeration and cliché means that the conventions of this third movement are not objectified in the manner of those in the finale. Instead, this movement produces an evocation of a lighter aesthetic, a “divertimento” character.

It is therefore at this point that I disagree with Chua: this movement does not present a critique of Classicism in the way that, for example, the replacement finale of the quartet does. I would suggest that the difference lies in the “aim” of the movements. In the alternative finale Beethoven utilises exaggerated, banal clichés in order to satirise musical conventionality and conservatism. In contrast, in this movement the divertimento-like, “Classical” thematic material is set in opposition with an ambiguous introduction. Therefore, whereas in the alternative finale the “Classical” element is satirised, in this movement it is placed in dialectical confrontation with the ambiguous and equivocal, an opposition that pervades the movement.

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<sup>52</sup> Lam (1975) p. 105

This opposition is established within the opening bars of the movement. The harmony of the first two bars essentially centres around two diminished chords, the first of which resolves to B flat minor, the second being transformed into A flat dominant seventh before resolving to the tonic (D flat major) at the beginning of the third bar. These diminished chords possess exactly the same type of inherent tonal ambiguity as that analysed in the opening of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Op. 59 quartet. In addition there is a momentary lexical ambiguity in the first solo B flat note that will prove to be significant later in the movement.

Ex. 7.4 Op. 130 3rd Movement

**Andante con moto, ma non troppo**  
*poco scherzando*

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

3

As in other cases – for example the opening of both Op. 130 and Op. 59 number 3 – the tonal ambiguity of the introduction delays the establishment of the tonic. Although B flat minor is implied at the beginning of the second bar, the instability of the diminished chords on either side of it prevents its tonicisation. In addition, the ambiguity these bars means that the arrival of the actual tonic in the 3<sup>rd</sup> bar is



undermined and is therefore not entirely stable. As Chua states, the tonic emerges “colouristically rather than cadentially”.<sup>53</sup>

This is significant in that it problematises the beginning of the movement. As Kerman demonstrates, the opening bars function as a type of transition from, or link to, the B flat tonal centres of both of the preceding movements, as well hinting towards the Cavatina.<sup>54</sup> However, in addition to this transitional function, these two bars also represent a truncated introduction. This introduction is problematic essentially because it is too short: in comparison with other similar introductions this one sounds somewhat curtailed. This is largely due to the arrival of the main theme in the third bar. Although the textural and thematic changes in this bar clearly signify the beginning of the theme, this is undermined by the uncertain tonality that results from the ambiguity of the opening bars. The effect of this is that the arrival of the first theme tends to sound “imposed” upon the preceding bars – it does not proceed *from* these bars but rather is inserted over the top. This insertion occurs too early for the harmonic structure, and as a result tends to sound as an interruption, curtailing the introduction too early.

It is perhaps at this point that the relevance of the “poco scherzoso” direction is seen. These first three bars may be taken as a juxtaposition of serious and comic of the type considered elsewhere in this work. The manner in which the main theme effectively interrupts the pathos of the opening gesture causes a somewhat comic effect, an ‘undercutting’ of the type seen so often in Beethoven.<sup>55</sup> It is significant that, in this interpretation that the ‘joking’ element therefore applies not to the first two bars, but rather to the comic effect introduced by the ‘Classical’ thematic material: throughout this movement the procedures and conventions of this ‘Classical’ theme are continually derailed by moments that are directly related to the opening.

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<sup>53</sup> Chua (1995) p. 184

<sup>54</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 314/315

<sup>55</sup> Not least in the finale of the 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony.

Significantly, however, the manner in which the introduction is interrupted also establishes and highlights the most fundamental oppositions of the movement: the opposition of ambiguity with stable diatonicism, equivocation with Classicism. This opposition occurs in the juxtaposition of topics in the second and third bars. The descending semitone gestures and the implied B flat minor tonality produce a "tragic" topic in the opening two bars; the tonal ambiguity of these bars is also part of their topic. These are opposed both to the stable diatonicism of the major tonality, and to the ascending melodic line, light staccato accompaniment and overall "dance" elements/topic of the first theme. The direct opposition between these two sections forms the fundamental dialectic that underlies much of the structure of the movement.

The most significant manifestations of these oppositions may be found where momentary ambiguities disrupt the tonal and thematic processes of the movement. The first of these occurs in bar 13. At bar 11 a new theme enters on the dominant, moving away from A flat and passing briefly to B flat minor at the beginning of bar 13. The sudden A flat 7<sup>th</sup> chord, however, interrupts abruptly, momentarily halting the music. Although there is an inherent ambiguity in this chord (as considered above, it could resolve in several ways), the tonal interruption it causes is slight; the tonality quickly settles back into A flat. However, although the tonality remains relatively stable, this interruption prompts the abandonment of the theme that had only been established two bars previously. Instead of the resumption of this subject, new thematic material is introduced in the cello at the end of bar 13. This new theme is unrelated (except tonally) to either the first theme or to that from bar 11; effectively it forms another second subject. The momentary interruption in bar 13 therefore begins an important process that recurs throughout the movement – the disruption of the tonal and thematic course by the interruption of momentary ambiguities.

## (Andante con moto, ma non troppo)

The musical score is for the 3rd Movement of Ex. 7.5 Op. 130, marked (Andante con moto, ma non troppo). It features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is common time (C). The score is divided into three systems, each starting with a measure number (11, 14, and 16 respectively).

**System 1 (Measures 11-13):** Measures 11 and 12 show a dense texture with rapid sixteenth-note passages in the Violin I and II parts, marked *fp* (fortissimo piano). The Viola and Violoncello parts provide a harmonic foundation with slower-moving lines. Measure 13 shows a dynamic shift to *pp* (pianissimo) in the Violin parts, with *fp* in the Viola and Violoncello.

**System 2 (Measures 14-15):** Measure 14 begins with a *pp* dynamic. The Violin parts have long rests, while the Viola and Violoncello continue with rhythmic patterns. Measure 15 features a *pp* dynamic in the Violin parts and a *p* (piano) dynamic in the Viola and Violoncello. The Viola part includes a sixteenth-note figure marked *pp*.

**System 3 (Measures 16-18):** Measure 16 starts with a *pp* dynamic. The Violin parts have long rests, while the Viola and Violoncello continue with rhythmic patterns. Measure 17 features a *pp* dynamic in the Violin parts and a *pp* dynamic in the Viola and Violoncello. The Viola part includes a sixteenth-note figure marked *pp*. Measure 18 shows a dynamic shift to *p* (piano) in the Violin parts, with *cresc.* (crescendo) in the Viola and Violoncello. The Viola part includes a sixteenth-note figure marked *pp*.

The next two interruptions intensify this disruption. The first interruption, though slight, prompted a change of thematic material; the second, in bar 17 is more

pronounced, the sudden syncopated *fp* chord forcing the tonality from A flat onto a C major chord. Since the C major chord occurs so suddenly, effectively as a foreign entity, its function is ambiguous: it could be a new tonal centre or a pivot chord to another key entirely. In addition to this ambiguity, the interruption halts the music's progress again, forcing the abandonment of the previous thematic material.

The third interruption, at the end of bar 19, is the most pronounced, completely halting the music and, again, prompting striking tonal and thematic changes. The C major chord of bar 17 becomes a dominant seventh at the end of the bar, and in bars 18 and 19 the tonality centres on F major. The quickening harmonic pace in bar 19 heads, via chromatic melodic motion towards a perfect cadence. However, at the crucial moment the interruption of the solitary D flat in the first violin deflects this cadential process, halting the progress of the music entirely. When it resumes it is with a recurrence of the first theme, now in C major (a remote key from the tonic).

It is important to note the manner in which the initial opposition of the movement is involved in this interruption. The descending semitone motion in the first violin in bars 19 and 20 obviously recalls that of the opening bars. More importantly the occurrence of the lexical ambiguity inherent within this single note reiterates the ambiguity of the opening: there are numerous ways in which this note could be resolved. Significantly, this produces a semantic link to the opening gesture – the ambiguities of both moments are understood to be related, effectively forming an ambiguous “topic”. More importantly, this relationship means that the entire semantic and topical structure of the introductory section is recalled at this moment, its oppositions condensed into only a couple of beats between bars 19 and 20. Moreover, this relationship is actually established between all three interruptions, since each introduces a momentary ambiguity and prompts a change of thematic material. Thus even the momentary ambiguities of the first two interruptions, by virtue of this semantic relationship, are derived from and related to the initial ambiguity – the ambiguous “topic” – of the opening gesture.

It may therefore be seen that the opposition established in the opening bars radically affects the progress of the movement, particularly the tonal and thematic course. Specifically, the ambiguity that first occurs in the opening bars disrupts the established conventions of the music. It undermines the harmonic and thematic course of the music through the momentary ambiguities of the interruptions, which continually disrupt the progress of the form by forcing sudden tonal and thematic changes.

Although the effect of these momentary ambiguities in the exposition is important, the development section produces an even more prominent ambiguity, specifically with regard to where it actually begins. Some commentators have suggested that this occurs with the unusual return of the first subject in C major in canon at bar 20, with the material in bars 26 to 31 forming a new developmental theme.<sup>56</sup> Others reckon the beginning of the development from bar 32, citing the harmonic course and cadential, codetta-like material from bar 27 onwards in support of this viewpoint.<sup>57</sup>

Both viewpoints, however, identify bar 37 as the beginning of the recapitulation: there is a recurrence of the opening gesture, with the cello's prominent semitone F flat – E flat substituted for the first violin's initial B flat – A, and the main theme enters in the tonic two bars later. From there the recapitulation proceeds as expected with a more or less literal repeat of the first subject, a retransition and the second thematic area in the tonic.

What is remarkable about this recapitulation, however, is that it occurs much too early in the movement. This introduces a problem for either of the viewpoints regarding the placement of the development. If the development is considered to occur at bar 20 then the interruption by the D flat in bar 19 forms a sudden diversion of the thematic and tonal structure, forcing the development into the second subject area. The interruption in bar 19 thus problematises the second subject area under this reading. However, if the development section is reckoned from bar 32 then the

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<sup>56</sup> See, for example, Cooper (1985) p. 377

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, Chua (1995) p. 181 and Kerman (1967) p. 317



recapitulation at bar 36 means that the development itself consists of a mere 4 bars, much too brief for even the tersest sonata form – it is the development that is problematised.<sup>58</sup>

Nevertheless, although I agree with this latter viewpoint, the crucial point is that the recapitulation in bar 36 actually occurs as an *interruption*, identical in effect to those considered in the exposition. Bars 32 to 35 represent only the *beginning* of a conventional development section: thematically these bars are derived from the codetta material, which is itself derived from the first theme. A new ascending scale figure is also added, along with a bass figuration that is perhaps related to that of the first theme. In addition from the end of bar 33 there is a conventional developmental modulatory process based upon circle of fifths motion.

It is not unusual for Beethoven to bring the music of introductions into later sections of the movement. However, the recurrence of the opening material at bar 36 abruptly halts the progression of this development, introducing slower homophonic motion instead of the rhythmic momentum and counterpoint of the previous bars. Moreover, because of the strong cadential gestures at the end of bar 35, A flat is expected at the beginning of bar 36. The diminished harmony that actually occurs therefore produces a harmonic diversion, and this unexpected harmony, together with the sudden cessation of rhythmic motion produces the effect of an interruption.

Ex. 7.6 Op. 130 3rd Movement  
(Andante con moto, ma non troppo)

Violin I  
Violin II  
Viola  
Violoncello

<sup>58</sup> It is worth noting that, although both Chua and Kerman subscribe to this latter interpretation, neither explains the interruption and drastic foreshortening of the development that results from the too-early occurrence of the recapitulation.

The image displays two systems of musical notation. The first system, labeled '34', contains four staves with a highly complex, dense texture of rapid sixteenth and thirty-second notes, suggesting a virtuosic or technically demanding passage. The second system, labeled '36', shows a more structured and sparse texture. It features a clear melodic line in the upper staves, often marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic, and a supporting bass line. The notation includes various dynamic markings such as *p* and *dim.* (diminuendo), indicating changes in volume and intensity. The overall style is characteristic of late 19th or early 20th-century classical music.

The significant point, for the current analysis, is that ambiguity plays an important role in the process of the interruption. Bar 36 obviously recalls the opening bars – the repeat of the melodic motion alone is enough to establish this. However, these bars also share the ambiguity with the other interruptions seen above, a reiteration of the ambiguous “topic”. Whereas these earlier interruptions diverted the harmonic and thematic course, this interruption completely derails the development section. More importantly, it forces the recapitulation to occur too early, severely truncating the form of the entire movement. Therefore, again, the normal procedures of a classical sonata form are diverted and problematised by an ambiguous interruption; once again there is the juxtaposition of the opposition seen within the opening 3 bars.

It is important to consider that the same pattern of interruption and juxtaposition is continued throughout the recapitulation of this movement. However, although the effect of this is similar to the first occurrences, the reiteration of these gestures mediates their disruptive consequences. In effect, they have become part of the movement’s conventions, and therefore are, to a certain degree, expected to reoccur.

As is often the case, however, the coda intensifies the problematic elements of the movement: between bars 67 and 77 Beethoven significantly augments the ambiguities seen above, to the point where, as Lam highlights, “all sense of the main tonic is, for the moment, lost”.<sup>59</sup> At bar 67 there is what appears to be the beginning of a re-transition. Because of its correspondence to bar 9, this produces the expectation of movement from the subdominant back to the tonic. Instead, bar 69 consists of a descending spiral of diminished 7<sup>ths</sup>, with the prolongation of this diminished harmony in bar 70. The tonal ambiguity produced by these diminished chords, which Kerman considers to be Beethoven’s most expressive, is extended in the three bars following, which form another recurrence of the opening gesture.<sup>60</sup> This recurrence is significantly altered however: the B flat in the first violin now occurs over diminished harmony, and resolves onto A dominant 7<sup>th</sup>. This gesture is repeated in bars 72 and 73, with resolutions onto A flat 7 and F7 respectively. Finally, bars 74 and 75 produce a significant alteration of the opening of the main theme: these function as a sequential modulatory progression from B flat to G flat, with added minor 9<sup>ths</sup> and chromatic motion that somewhat obscure the tonality.

Throughout bars 67 to 77 there is, therefore, a continual process of ambiguity. The diminished harmony present throughout bars 69 and 70, as well as within bars 71 to 73 is inherently ambiguous, as considered above. Significantly however, the dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chords onto which all the diminished chords in bars 71 to 73 resolve are themselves ambiguous, since each could resolve in several different ways. There is therefore an attenuation of the ambiguity of these gestures: one ambiguous chord “resolving” onto another. The tonal uncertainty created by these bars is continued through the modulation process of bars 74 to 76. Although such progressions are very common, the presence of dominant seventh chords, as well as the uncertainty of the eventual tonal destination of the sequence, does produce a certain ambiguity, particularly within the context of the preceding bars.

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<sup>59</sup> Lam (1975) p. 105

<sup>60</sup> Kerman (1967) p. 316

## (Andante con moto, ma non troppo)

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

67

69

71

75

*p* *pp* *pizz.* *sempre pp*

*arco 3* *sempre pp*

*p* *più p* *p* *più p* *p* *più p*

*-pp* *cresc.* *mf* *mf* *p*

*-pp* *cresc.* *mf* *mf* *p*

*-pp* *cresc.* *mf* *mf* *p*

*-pp* *cresc.* *mf* *mf* *p*

The effect of this passage is significant. These bars may be considered as an iteration of the ambiguity that has been so important in the progress of the

movement. As was stated, the opposition of this ambiguity with the “Classicism” of the thematic material became, through repetition, a convention of the movement, thereby reducing the effect of the juxtapositions within the recapitulation. However, the novelty of the passage from bar 67 foregrounds both this ambiguity and, as a result the fundamental opposition of the movement, once more.

This may be seen once more in the closing 10 bars of the movement. At bar 77 the music, following this extended passage of ambiguity, settles back into a stable tonal centre, with a perfect cadence in the tonic at bar 79. However, even this return is undermined by the sudden shift to B flat major in bar 80. This abrupt movement perhaps underlines the important tonal relationship present in the opening gesture. The B flat of the opening bar, which becomes B flat minor in the second, is the same key as the preceding movement. Moreover, if the opening bars are understood as a movement from an initial B flat, through B flat minor to D flat in the third bar, then these bars may be taken as a microcosm of the tonal plan of the first three movements. The interruption at this key point in the coda – at the very point where the tonality is to be re-established – by B flat is therefore quite significant, reiterating at the close of the movement a striking tonal relationship from the opening.

Regardless of this, the effect of this sudden B flat chord is to once more produce a check on the music’s progress. Once more there is a moment of tonal uncertainty and the music is forced needs to “find” itself. Indeed it is only at bar 85 that there is a return to D flat and to thematic material, and only in the very last cadence does the tonality of this movement assert itself unequivocally. The fundamental opposition that has dominated the movement so far therefore punctuates even the coda of this movement. Right to the end of this movement the light, “Classical” divertimento character is continuously interrupted by the “dysphoric”, “tragic” gestures of the opening material and by the “topic” of tonal and thematic ambiguity.



80

*Andante e un poco, ma non troppo*

Violin I

*cresc.*

*pp*

*sempre pp*

Violin II

*cresc.*

*pp*

*sempre pp*

Viola

*cresc.*

*pp*

*sempre pp*

Violoncello

*cresc.*

*pp*

*pp*

*pp*

*cresc.*

*dim.*

*p*

*cresc.*

*dim.*

*p*

*pp*

*cresc.*

*dim.*

*p*

In a sense this reading prompts its own interpretation: it is possible to argue that the opposition that pervades this movement results in the objectification of the conventions of this movement. In such an interpretation the constant juxtaposition of the divertimento thematic material with the dysphoric, ambiguous elements/topic produces an undermining of the “Classical” elements, thereby indicating their inherent artifice.

This interpretation would be similar to Chua's: he considers this movement, and indeed the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> movements of this quartet, as a 'critique' of Classicism and Biedermeier domesticity.<sup>61</sup> He argues that this critique is achieved through an exaggeration and dislocation of the Classical language from which the movement is constructed.<sup>62</sup> However, the exaggeration of the elements and procedures of the Classical style would, as considered in the previous chapter, almost invariably result

<sup>61</sup> Chua (1995) p. 165

62 "The wit of this movement is a cutting wit, for this is not simply a piece of nostalgia but a critique which exaggerates these processes until they dismantle the precision of the surface." Ibid. p. 183

"Beethoven is tampering . . . with the very construction of the Classical language – the syntax of tonality, the punctuation of cadences, the articulation of themes." Ibid. p. 188

in satirical effect. As was stated earlier though, I suggest that the “Classical” elements of the main thematic material of this movement do not possess the exaggeration, cliché and banality that were seen within that of the replacement finale for the quartet. Although there is a certain undermining of Classical conventions within this movement, in comparison to the later movement, this one sounds positively authentic. The lack of exaggeration means that there is no real element of satire in this movement, no critique of the actual language or conventions of the “Classical” style.

Rather, within this movement the “Classical” elements occur as a *symbol*. This symbol is used to signify not simply the style of Beethoven’s predecessors Mozart and Haydn, but also to represent the ideals of the Enlightenment itself. The evocation of the Classical style in this movement – particularly of the tonal and thematic process – represents the balance and order of the Enlightenment, the belief in clarity, in science and, above all in logic. The opposition of this symbol with its antithesis creates the dynamic of the movement. Everywhere in this movement the classical style is confronted with, and interrupted by ambiguity, equivocality and dysphoria. This fundamental opposition problematises the main structural points of the movement: the introduction, the second subject, the development, the recapitulation and the coda are all significantly undermined by moments of ambiguity.

There is a sense in which, try as it might, Enlightenment logic and order is constantly derailed and aborted by the presence of its opposite. Every time it tries to assert itself its success is limited: it is only a matter of time before another interruption occurs. This process explains the high percentage of cadential gestures that Chua identifies within the movement. Virtually every interruption results in a tonal deflection away from the “correct” key; the preponderance of cadential material may therefore be understood as an attempt, following such diversions, to re-assert the tonality of the movement and to re-establish its tonal course. In other words, it is an attempt to re-assert the “Classicism” of the thematic material.

This movement does not, therefore, represent a straightforward critique of Classicism *per se*. Rather, it produces a confrontation of the Classical style and, by implication, Enlightenment ideals with the equivocal and ambiguous. The use of an unmistakably Classical language, and in particular a divertimento style, does produce the “joking” effect implied by the *poco scherzoso* indication. This light-heartedness, however, is a mask that veils a more serious point: throughout the movement there is a fundamental opposition of certainty, order and logic with uncertainty and ambiguity.

The crucial point, however, is that the use of ambiguity in this opposition is not inherently ironic. The play of implication and resolution produces a tonal ambiguity that frustrates every attempt at “Classical” order. However, although this creates a striking opposition, the actual ambiguities themselves do not produce objectification: the processes involved in these moments of equivocation are therefore, as seen, fundamentally different from those of irony. Rather in this movement the distinct aesthetic effect of “functional” ambiguity is elevated to a central position; in this movement the ascendancy of the immanent level results not in irony but in equivocation.

## Conclusion

Beethoven's quartets are great works of art. Part of the power of these works, as with all great artworks, lies in their ability to sustain multiple interpretations without loss, to accommodate new readings or new significances that may be attached to them by successive interpreters or analysts. Their strength, in other words, lies in their multivalence, in their "openness".

It is perhaps because of the contemporary concern with such equivocation and plurality that irony is increasingly a topic of musicological research, and indeed is becoming an increasingly accepted element of Beethoven scholarship. This thesis has brought an interpretation of these works that places them within the context of irony, particularly Friedrich Schlegel's philosophy of Romantic irony. The understanding of Romantic irony and the analytical interpretation advanced throughout this work differs from those of other writers in that Beethoven's irony is viewed not only as a rhetorical device or an authorial presence, but rather as a fundamental aesthetic position. The irony it reveals in these works is not circumscribed in moments, or in the "breaking of illusion" alone but rather is a constant state, a fundamental paradox. These different approaches, however, are complementary – Beethoven's irony is Romantic and existential, but it is also rhetorical and satirical, as the interpretation of the replacement finale of Op. 130 suggested.

The interpretation of these works offered here, though, suggests that they revel in the fecundity of the equivocal, of ambiguity, paradox, irony and chaos. The objectification of each of the individual musical systems within these movements implicates the artifice of all musical systems. There is no privileging of any system or viewpoint, unless it be the privileging of heterogeneity over unity, of paradox and contradiction over certainty. This is encapsulated succinctly in one of Schlegel's fragments:

It's equally fatal for the mind to have a system and to have none. It will simply have to decide to combine the two.<sup>1</sup>

The paradox that this fragment infers strikes at the root of our conceptions of meaning: even though the creation of “systems” or “actualities” is meaningless, nevertheless, humanity requires and seeks such actualities in order to function. We are thus held, motionless, between the need for meaning and the impossibility of meaning; we exist, in other words, in a state of ironic paradox.

Considering Beethoven's work within the historical context of Schlegel's thought – as a paradoxical combination of system and non-system, of the meaningful and the meaningless – thus relates it to an aesthetic conception that came to have profound importance, not simply within the context of Romanticism, but also in Twentieth-century art and aesthetics. Moreover, it can lead to conclusions that are, perhaps paradoxically, of relevance to contemporary concerns. Within the context of postmodernism, the thought encapsulated by the fragment quoted above sounds distinctly contemporary: there is a similar regression of meaning, a similar oscillation between significance and emptiness. Moreover, there is in both postmodernism and Schlegel's Romanticism a similar baseline self-irony, a similar objectification of the inherent artifice of all human constructions.

This similarity suggests possibilities for ways in which this discourse might progress. For example, it might be possible to relate the conception of Beethoven's works given here to concepts such as Bakhtin's ‘heteroglossia’, conceiving of them as a plurality of utterances or ‘voices’, none of which is privileged. Or it might be possible to examine the relationship between the process of objectification identified within these works and the deconstruction both of musical “meaning” and of the boundaries between musical genres. Of particular interest might be the relationship between the fragmentary nature of the late works and the Romantic conception of the fragment, a conception that, as was briefly mentioned, relates once more to irony. This in turn might establish a dialogue

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<sup>1</sup> Schlegel (1991) *Atheneum* fragment no. 53 p. 24



with more modern conceptions of the fragment, such as those suggested by Adorno. All such approaches – which are beyond the scope of this thesis – would reinforce once more the veracity of Stravinsky's famous statement that the late works (or at least the *Grosse Fuge*) are “contemporary music that will remain forever contemporary”.<sup>2</sup>

The approach used here – the suggested relationship between Beethoven and Schlegel – reflects, however, the current hermeneutic approach of historical musicology. In other words it attempts to relate Beethoven's work to a philosophical conception that was contemporaneous, and to establish an analytical interpretation within a historical context that is directly pertinent to the works considered.

I use the word ‘interpretation’ advisedly, for in a post-modern, post-formalist context it is increasingly the case that all analyses may be considered interpretations, and the process of analysis as a reading of the text.<sup>3</sup> In this context it is perhaps surprising to use a structural approach. However, so far as such concepts are concerned, I think the ongoing rethinking and deconstruction of musicological method and analysis runs the risk of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Rather than rejecting such approaches outright a synthesis ought to be possible, whereby structural approaches can be used as tools or bases for analysis without necessarily subscribing to the *a priori* assumptions of structuralism.

In other words, provided that one acknowledges that such concepts as “surface” or “deep” structures (and to an extent the notion of structure itself) are analytical conceptions or metaphors, then it is possible to use them to formulate a reading of the discourse. For metaphor is by nature an additive process – an accretion – that illuminates by comparison. It does not embody a “real” relationship between the two constituent elements, but rather a perceived relationship or an analytical judgement. On

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<sup>2</sup> Stravinsky and Craft (1982) p. 124

<sup>3</sup> I use the word “text” here even more advisedly, without specifying whether it refers to the written score, the performance of the music or otherwise.

this basis structural approaches may be used to provide a comparative model, focussing on specific elements or qualities within the music. Such approaches, which may seem contingent, can still facilitate analytical insight, provided one acknowledges the limitations of the given metaphor.

A structural approach is particularly useful when it comes to differentiation, and it is on such a basis that the suggested differentiation between irony and ambiguity functions. The contemporary focus on the equivocal and multivalent resulting from deconstructive approaches makes it particularly important to consider the nature of, and relationships between, equivocal modes of communication. For if, as a result of this shift, “even the most apparently unambiguous texts prove to contain the makings of doubt and uncertainty”,<sup>4</sup> then the elision of the ambiguous and the ironic means that even such apparently unequivocal texts might be considered ironic. The attempt at a differentiation arises from a conviction that elision of these phenomena weakens their veracity, making their effect commonplace,<sup>5</sup> and that multiplicity of interpretation should not be confused with irony.

Differentiating irony and ambiguity is, I believe, particularly important in relation to Beethoven's quartets for, as seen, these works may be understood in terms of both phenomena. This differentiation allows more detailed discussion and greater critical appreciation of their different aesthetic purposes and effects within these works. However, it also allows a clearer understanding of the relationships between these phenomena and other aesthetic concerns within the larger corpus of the composer's work. This is necessary because, as Nicholas Cook succinctly states, in addressing his

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<sup>4</sup> Whittall, Arnold (1999) ‘Autonomy/Heteronomy’ in *Rethinking Music* ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist

<sup>5</sup> This assumption, of course, begs deconstructing – why shouldn't they be commonplace? Why should they be privileged? The only answer that I can offer is that if irony and ambiguity become commonplace – a ground-state of all art, all communication, all meaning – then we lose something valuable, even if that value is only culturally established. We risk denying ourselves access to a mode of thought that has, as Muecke points out (Muecke (1970) p. 2-3), been seen within much of our greatest art, literature and, I would add, music.

work we must “keep before us . . . the image of a Beethoven who was both earnest and ironical”.<sup>6</sup> Beethoven’s quartets are an amalgam of both equivocation – satire, Romantic irony, paradox and ambiguity – and forthrightness, a fusion of both Romanticism and Classicism. As a result, Beethoven’s relationship to Schlegel’s Romantic artform

embraces everything that is purely poetic, from the greatest systems of art, containing within themselves still further systems, to the sigh, the kiss that the poetising child breathes forth in artless song . . . It alone can become, like the epic, a mirror of the whole circumambient world, an image of the age. And it can also – more than any other form – hover at the midpoint between the portrayed and the portrayer, free of all real and ideal self-interest, on the wings of poetic reflection, and can raise that reflection again and again to a higher power, can multiply it in an endless succession of mirrors.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Cook (1993) p. 105

<sup>7</sup> Schlegel (1991) *Athenaeum* fragment 116 p. 31/32

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